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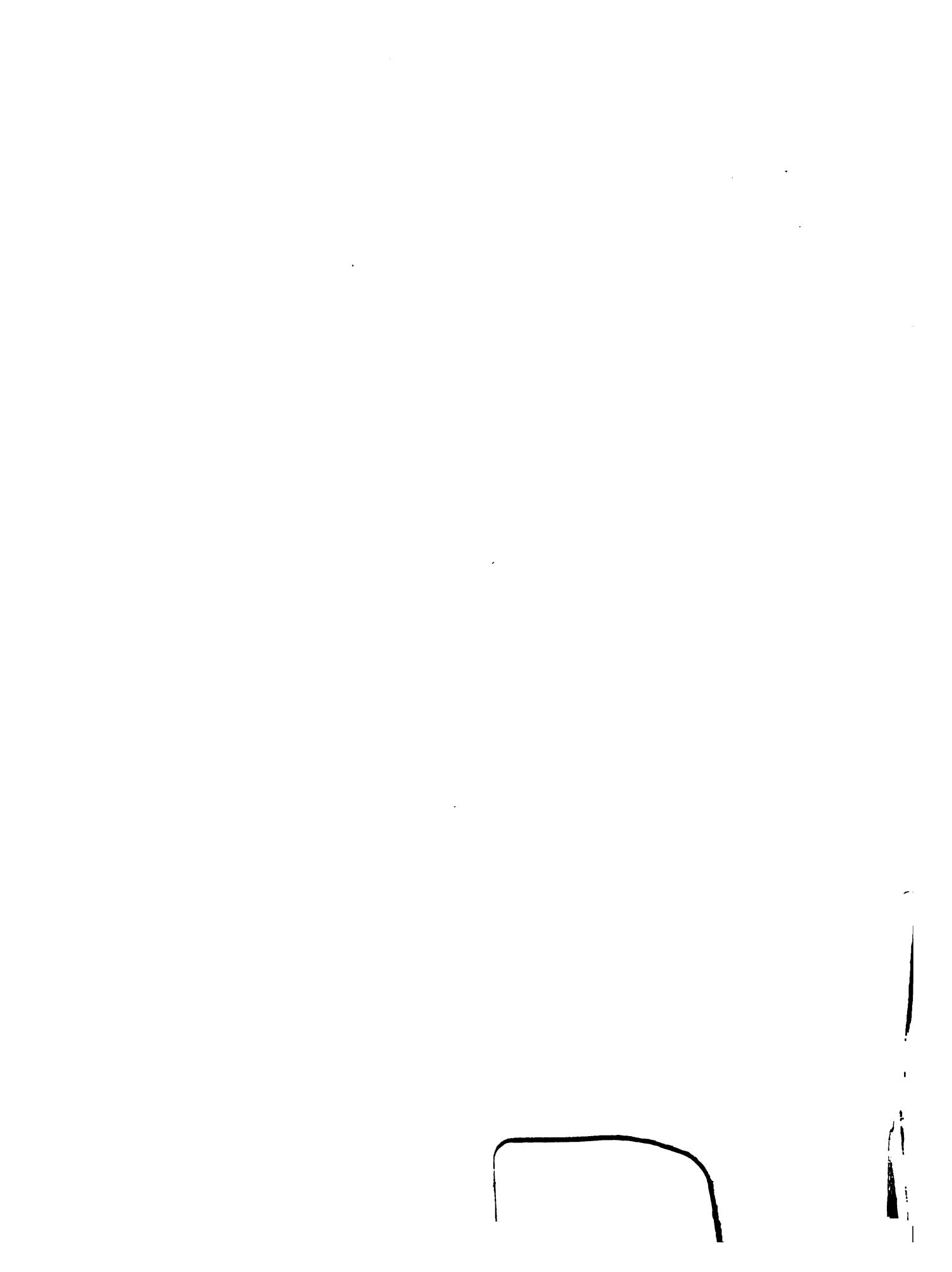
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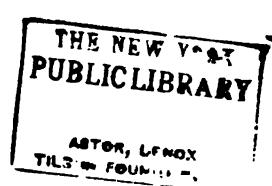
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O U R R I V E R .

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THAMES TROPHIES.

10.1.1920
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OR

OUR RIVER.

"Thamesis meus ante omnes." MILTON.

... the christall Thamis wont to slide
In silver channell, downe along the lee." SPENSER.

1

BY
GEORGE D. ^{Dunlop} LESLIE, R.A.

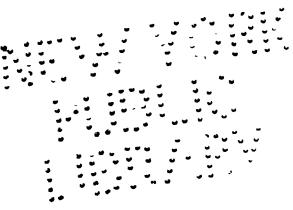


ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON: BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO., BOUVERIE STREET.

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M. S.





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P R E F A C E.



I WAS finishing a picture some years ago for the Royal Academy exhibition, when Sir Edwin Landseer paid a visit to my studio for the purpose of giving me the benefit of his advice. I remember beginning in a nervous manner to excuse the shortcomings of my work, pointing out those parts of it with which I was dissatisfied, or on which I intended bestowing more labour, when he stopped me at once, saying, "Never do that, always leave your faults for others to find out." I have not forgotten this valuable piece of advice, and in presenting this book to the public, shall waste no words in apologising for what incompleteness, or want of literary skill, there may be in its composition.

I have written as a labour of love, with the desire of leaving a slight record of the many happy days of my life that have been spent on the upper reaches of our noble river.

Naturally of an indolent disposition, I should not have undertaken such a work, had I not been lately much stirred by feelings of melancholy indignation at the many changes which I have witnessed taking place on the river banks—changes which, though perhaps necessary and unavoidable, are nevertheless slowly but surely destroying the simplicity, the picturesqueness, and the natural beauty so highly prized by artistic river lovers. Even while I am writing, one of the finest old weirs on the Upper Thames is being removed, and a hideous, wrought-iron construction substituted in its place. The doom of another is also, I believe, fixed, and no doubt in a few years' time a picturesque old wooden weir, with its lashers and bucks, will have become a thing of the past.

But there are other changes to be noticed, that have not the plea of necessity in their favour, such as the sewage pollution, the steam-launch nuisance, the erection of ugly bridges and vulgar houses, &c., about which I felt it might not be altogether useless to write in terms of condemnation.

In the description of our river I have confined myself to those parts of it with which I am best acquainted: to the banks, villages, locks, flowers, and animals, which have been my especial delight. I have purposely left unmentioned many important

places, noblemen's seats, and other well-known objects of interest ; these having been ably and fully described in the numerous books on the subject already published.

In my desire to make more widely known the peculiar advantages belonging to my favourite boat, I may seem at times, to the generality of my readers, a little troublesome, but shall be quite satisfied if what I have written on this head should prove useful to those who may now, or at any future time, appreciate the charms of the punt pole.

I desire to return my public thanks to my dear friend, H. S. Marks, R.A., for the valuable assistance he generously gave me in bringing the work to completion.

The same thanks I would render to my kind friend and publisher, Mr. W. H. Bradbury, for his courteous and ever ready help. To Miss Stapleton, of Remenham Hill, I am indebted for much information as to the vicinity of Henley in the olden times.

With regard to the illustrations, I am sorry that my regular professional occupation has not allowed me time to execute a larger number ; the literary part of the work could be done at any time, whereas the drawings required precious daylight. I

wish to thank Mr. W. J. Mosses for the great pains and skill he has bestowed on the engravings; as a wonderful piece of facsimile work, nothing can exceed his rendering of the small pen-and-ink drawing by Walker, given in Chapter II., even some half-erased pencil marks being accurately represented.

The little illustration by Mr. Marks, entitled, "Interested Spectators," was drawn from three village children, who were watching me at work in the almshouse cloisters at Ewelme. This sketch gave him the first idea for his picture of the group of figures looking over a bridge, called "What is it?"

Several others of my artist friends have, since the work was in the press, offered to execute drawings for insertion, and I am sorry that want of time prevents me from availing myself of their kindness, though I might possibly do so in some future edition.

In conclusion, I wish to dedicate this, my first, and probably only literary effort,

To My MOTHER.



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INTERESTED SPECTATORS.

BY H. S. MARKS, R.A.



OUR RIVER.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST EXPERIENCES IN BOATING.—HUNTERFORD BRIDGE.—VISITS TO HAMPTON.—HAMPTON COURT.—MRS. SNELL.—FIRST VISIT TO HENLEY.—MY FIRST REGATTA.—PANGBOURNE.—G. P. BOYCE.—EDWIN FIELD.—VISIT TO OXFORD.—WARGRAVE.—MAIDENHEAD.—MRS. COPELAND.—“THE STRAWBERRY POTTE.”



LIKE most English boys, I was from my earliest years greatly captivated by the charms of boats. When very young I had been frequently allowed to go in boats at the seaside, but this pleasure was somewhat marred by the fact that my brothers and I were never permitted to take a boat out by ourselves; it was a *sine qua non* that the man should accompany us. Boats, however, at the seaside are never the same thing at all as boats on a river; they are clumsy and heavy to pull, there is always a

certain amount of uneasy motion, and the oars are awkward to manage; the great charm of river boating—the sense of smooth progression, which is mainly owing to the contiguity of the banks on either side, is entirely absent on the great wide sea.

I was about thirteen years old when I first experienced the true delights of river boating. On our way home from the Mercers' School, in the City, a boy named Hogsflesh and myself were in the habit of meeting my elder brother Bradford* at Hungerford Bridge, where we hired a boat for six-pence an hour, usually rowing up to Vauxhall or Chelsea and back. These expeditions gained a good deal of surreptitious pleasure from the fact that they were carried on without the knowledge of our parents. I find in a diary kept by my brother at this time many entries as to these delightful days, such as the following:—

“*27th May, 1849.*—Several very pleasant pulls on the river last week; yesterday to Chelsea with George and Johnson.

“*May 31st.*—George rows with a pair of sculls, strong enough to make some way against a Thames tide.

“*June 8th.*—Went up to Chelsea from Tomlinson's (Hungerford Bridge).”

I can well remember the look of Tomlinson's boats; they were of a dull grey-green colour, with faded red stripes on them. The sculls were never pairs, and had old worn leathers and buttons.

* Now a distinguished engineer in India; then in Mr. Brunel's office at Westminster.

These boats rejoiced in such names as "Jenny Lind," "Red Rover," &c., painted on the backboard in the stern ; they were to be found alongside a sort of "hard" or quay which ran down to the water underneath the Suspension Bridge. The place was on a fine day most enjoyable ; great straw-laden barges with tanned sails and brightly painted gear, and large vanes on their mast-heads, lay there side by side ; the penny and halfpenny steamboats every now and then bustling up to their floating piers ; the mysterious dark arches of the Adelphi, through which we sometimes passed from the steamboat wharf ; and the delightful old Market, with its fruit, and gold fish, and large brown shrimps. These things formed a perfect paradise to a boy like me, just out of school on a Saturday half-holiday. It was my first river bank. It has all now vanished away, and gone utterly for ever ; railroads overhead and railroads underground, a huge Hotel and Station, and beautiful modern Embankment, with trees and gardens and "Coleoptrous Needle," as my little girl calls it, mark the spot. In the mud banks where the District Railway now burrows, I recollect arrowheads actually flowering, and occasionally even swans floating about.

Here it was I learnt to row and steer after a fashion, and emboldened by practice, Hogsflesh and myself would sometimes go alone. One occasion I particularly remember, as I had the misfortune to break a scull against a great pile standing in the water, and after, with great difficulty, getting back to the boat-letter with the remaining scull, had then to leave my Greek lexicon in pawn for five shillings damages which Mr. Tomlinson demanded. The man was bothered with the book when he looked into it, but as it was nicely bound and

large he agreed to take it until I should pay up the five shillings.

The scull was a wretched old worn thing, and I firmly believe not worth a shilling, but it never occurred to me to doubt the man's valuation.

Pocket money was a thing unknown to me in my school-days, and it required a good deal of managing to collect the requisite sum. I had a little money given me each day to pay my omnibus fare and dinner at a chop-house, a goodish bit could be saved by short commons and walking, and I rather think in this case one of my sisters to whom I confided helped me a little ; anyhow, it was with a sense of profound relief that I carried home the Schrevelius safe in my bag about a week after the event. They were very happy days generally, however, and I do not remember any other contretemps occurring.

We took with us pottles of strawberries, bags of black-heart cherries, or papers of large shrimps. We got very bold, too, and sometimes rowed down towards London Bridge, steering out to get the swell from the steamers, and I cannot help wondering now by what possible chance we escaped drowning.

My first experience of the superior charms of rowing on clear clean water, was on the occasion of a small water picnic, which my elder brother Robert, with my sisters and some other young ladies, got up ; they hired a nice roomy boat at Chelsea, and rowed up with the tide to Teddington. I was allowed to row sometimes, and the sight of my oar showing through the transparent water was a novel and delightful sensation ; the water must have been a great deal clearer than it was when I lately went over it, for I well recollect, somewhere below Kew, dropping my brother Bob's silver christening mug overboard in the

middle of the river, and seeing it sink flickering to the bottom ; and though we could not recover it, I have a distinct recollection of the clearness of the water, and seeing the trailing weeds and gravel on the bottom.

Not very long after this period, my father, to my great delight, took a house for the summer at Hampton ; the attraction of the place to him, being the pictures at Hampton Court, where he made copies from some of the cartoons, and painted the background of his picture of "The Rape of the Lock." My sisters and I used to row him down to the Palace in the morning, and bring him back in the afternoon. We hired a nice boat for eight shillings a week of a Mrs. Snell, whom I saw a year or two ago at the old landing-place, looking very nearly as blooming and well as she did five-and-twenty years ago, the little spring gushing out of its iron pipe as merrily as ever, the horse-boat, the church, and the whole place very little altered.

Our visit to Hampton was so successful, that it was repeated for several years, and I became quite expert in the matter of rowing-boats, and recollect once trying my hand at punting, making of course a sad failure. Many and many were the excursions made by my sisters and me in those happy days, sometimes as far as Shepperton, or even Chertsey ; my mother made us apple turnovers, and cakes ; and these, with sandwiches, we ate with enjoyment not to be described, in our boat, tied up beneath the willows of an eyot.

I trust my friend Mrs. Snell will pardon me, if I here allude to a little temporary difficulty we had with her about the hiring of our boat ; the point in dispute being as to whether Sunday was to be included in our week's hiring. The matter

came to a deadlock one evening, but the next morning the following letter established the friendly footing once again.

The letter ran thus:—

“Mrs. J. Snell presents her thumble compliments to Miss Leslie, and mother hopes she will look over last night, as she were in a temper, and it is quite agiant her feelings to effend any parties. Miss Leslie may have the boat whenever they like.

“Your thumble servant,

“J. SNELL.”

I painted the portraits of Mrs. Snell’s two little girls, and from the local success of this work obtained my first regular commission, which was to paint the portrait of the governess of a family which was staying at Hampton; for this picture I received two guineas, and it led to an order to paint a group of the four children of the family with whom the governess lived.

Mrs. Snell, and her sons John and Harry, were the first regular river-side boat proprietors with whom I became acquainted, and were capital specimens of a class for which I have ever had great respect and admiration.

They are always hard-working, cheerful, pleasant people, of obliging manners, and full of quaint humour and river-side stories. They all possess that indescribable charm which seems to me to belong to anyone who lives in the open air a great deal, and has anything to do with boats.

Mrs. Snell’s sons usually distinguished themselves in the Regattas we saw there, and were particularly good at walking the greasy pole, and letting out a pig from a basket which hung from

the end of the pole ; this sport was termed a pig hunt, and generally concluded the evening's amusement on a Regatta day. The unfortunate pig fell into the water, and was dived after by the whole of the competitors.

Perhaps it was John Snell's early practice at this, which enabled him afterwards to distinguish himself by rivalling Blondin ; for he not only walked across the Thames on a tight rope, but afterwards, at the Polytechnic Institution, he performed a number of feats on the rope, such as wheeling a barrow on it with his head in a sack. I saw this performance of his, and Professor Pepper acted as expositor and lecturer on the occasion.

It was during one of our visits to Hampton that I remember frequently seeing Mr. Millais ; he was engaged on his pictures of "Ophelia" and "The Huguenot," and lived at Surbiton in a small house close by the Roman Catholic church. The boat he used to paint in, is, I have been told, still in existence, on a decoy pond, at a house near Taplow Railway Station. We frequently met him in the gardens of Hampton Court, on the days when the band played ; he was usually accompanied by Charles Collins and Halliday, who were followers of the *Præ-Raphaelite* school of painting. Mr. Millais was tall and slim, with beautiful fair curling hair, and dressed in a rather clerical style of coat. I remember the little golden goose which he wore as a scarf pin. My father painted a small portrait of him about that time, which he used as a study for the head of Lord Petre, in the picture of "The Rape of the Lock." My father worked at this picture, the background of which was taken from one of the rooms in the Palace, sometimes on the public days, as well as on the one private day, and he was much amused by the remarks that were frequently made. A small boy after watching

him for some time, asked him, "If it was all a clean sheet of paper when he began it?" My father replied, "Yes." "Did you do it all yourself?" and on my father again answering "Yes," the boy whispered to his companion, "That was all a clean sheet of paper when he began—he did it all himself."

We visited an old lady and her two daughters who lived as pensioners in the Palace; they had a set of the rooms with the round windows which look so effective on the garden façade, and I remember that from the interior, these large circular windows had a charming effect, giving the rooms something the aspect of a ship's cabin; there were cosy cushioned seats in the recesses of each window. I can most confidently recommend the attention of the disciples of the Queen Anne school of architecture to these finely contrived specimens of Wren's genius.

Just inside the outer gates of the Palace there used in those days to be a small confectioner's shop, kept by a Miss Marmot, where out and away the nicest cheese-cakes I ever tasted could be obtained, their peculiar charm being a sort of crispness on the surface, very unlike the usual clammy things sold as maids of honour.

My experiences at Hampton gave me such strong feelings of affection for the river, that I do not think I have passed a single year since then without spending one, two, and sometimes three months on its banks. It must have been about eight years after my adventures at Hungerford Bridge, that I paid my first visit to Henley, where I spent a few weeks with my brother-in-law. We stayed at Mrs. Johnson's hotel, the "Angel," and had as a sitting-room the upper one with the quaint bow windows, from which a view was obtained of the bridge and the race-course. I never saw Henley Bridge without some one looking over it at

the river below. It is a most fascinating bridge to look over. All bridges are delightful to look over, but Henley is the best in this respect I ever knew. There are landing places for boats on either side, and always just enough going on to gently interest one. The stone balustrade is exactly the right height to lean on, and there is a ledge below, which seems made on purpose to put one foot on ; indeed, it has been well used in this way, as between the base of each little pillar of the balustrade the stone is worn into round hollows. There is at one corner the thick foliage of a plane tree, under which you can pause during a shower, and the open balustrade lets the cool air play gently on your legs in hot weather. I never walk over Henley Bridge without stopping, and indeed, believe no one else ever does.

At the time we were at Henley, the "Lion" was shut up, and grass grew in front of the arched entrance. Mrs. Williams a few years afterwards reopened it, and its glory now has considerably returned. In the summer time a smart well-appointed yellow coach-and-four changes horses there as in bygone days ; it is the "Oxford Coach,"* which comes bowling over the bridge to the sound of the horn, with a guard in red jacket and gold lace, and pulls up at the old gateway, where four fresh horses stand, with ostlers attending. Ladders are brought out, the passengers get down, like Mr. Squeers, to "stretch their legs," amidst the small admiring crowd of boys and men who, as Washington Irving said, seem to get their living by seeing coaches go off. When the horses are put-to and the passengers seated again, with more horn-blowing away rattles the coach up Hart and Bell Street, and along the fair mile to Nettlebed and Oxford.

* I am sorry to say that for the last two years this coach has discontinued running.—*July, 1880.*

The small crowd of idlers return again to the never-failing delights of river-gazing from the bridge.

At the time of my first visit to Henley, there were at least six or seven gigantic poplars along the tow-path ; of these a few weird and picturesque stumps are all that now remain. They were perhaps the first Lombardy poplars ever planted in England ; in the days of Horace Walpole these trees were first brought to this country, and it became all the fashion to plant them, and here General Conway planted these. They grow very quickly, but are unfortunately rather short-lived trees, a little more than a hundred years being their limit. I am sorry to see that the young trees that have been planted to supply the places of the old ones are not of the Lombardy kind, but are the ordinary black poplars. I think the tall straight lines of the old trees composed splendidly with the grand river view, and produced a much more striking effect than their young bushy successors are ever likely to do.

When I first rowed on the river here, I was puzzled to know which was up and which was down stream ; the current is very gentle, partaking of the general sleepy character of the town itself, and the river runs here nearly due north, which seems to anyone accustomed to it at Hampton, as I was, entirely contradictory.

I witnessed Henley Regatta for the first time a year or two after my stay at the "Angel." It was in company with Charles Dickens junior, and a young American friend, W. D. Morgan, the son of my father's and Dickens's old friend, Captain Morgan. A boat had been sent down to Henley from Searle's for us, and we had beds procured for us in the town, taking our breakfast at the "Angel," of the mutton chops at

which repast I have still a kindly recollection. I have witnessed the Regatta nearly every year since, but the impression of that first one remains still in my memory as bright and exciting as ever.

The Eton boys won the Ladies' Challenge, and as young Dickens was a rowing man, and member of the London Rowing Club, he met with a great number of friends, who entertained us with cups, and all sorts of hospitality. The evening of the second day was passed in a variety of wild amusements, amongst other things a moonlight dance round an unfortunate organ grinder; we formed a ring with joined hands, and whirled furiously around, whilst he had to play for his life in the middle. Then a party surrounded the door of Mr. Towsey, the Clerk of the Course, and summoned him to come out and read the rules, about which there had been some dispute during the day; a speech was also made from the bed-room window over Mr. Thackara's shop, by a member of the L. R. C., surnamed the "Slogger," which excited the men below so much, that an attempt was made to scale the window; in the end I believe the "Slogger" had the best of it. After this a member of the Berks Constabulary arrived, and with a little kind persuasion, peace and quiet at length prevailed.

The next morning we started off down stream, and rowed to Putney, making a night's stoppage at the "Bells of Ouseley."

About this time I passed two very pleasant months at Whitchurch, opposite to Pangbourne, and became acquainted with the beauties of Streatley, Maple Durham, Hardwick House, and Hart's Woods. At Pangbourne, I met my friend G. P. R. Boyce, the water-colour artist, who was lodging at Champ's picturesque little cottage, on the edge of the weir pool; the

rooms were very old and small, and it pleased Mr. Boyce's taste to hang amongst the humble cottage pictures one or two precious little works by D. Rossetti. He had brought with him also some of his favourite old blue tea-cups and plates. He painted two very fine works whilst I was at Whitchurch : one of Champ's cottage itself and the weir pool with a twilight effect, and the other of a large old barn half-way up the hill at Whitchurch ; there were a lot of black Berkshire pigs snoozling in the straw in the foreground.

Edwin Field, the distinguished solicitor, was then living at Streatley, and I recollect rowing up with Boyce to have supper with him. Field was an ardent lover of the river. One or more of his numerous artist friends were generally enjoying his hospitality at Cleve, he himself sketching from nature with the eager enthusiasm with which he pursued every occupation of his life. I believe he was connected in some way by descent with Oliver Cromwell ; he had an exceedingly fine head, and keen grey eyes, and in all manly sports no younger man could surpass him. His memory should be cherished by all artists for the pains he took in mastering all the intricacies of the laws of artistic copyright, and if he had lived I have little doubt but the injustice and absurdities of the present law would have been righted long ago. His sad loss will long be felt by all who knew him. His death was as noble as his life, for when his sailing boat upset in the reach above Cleve mill, a friend of his was with him who could not swim, and it was in the endeavour to save this friend that Edwin Field perished.

From Pangbourne I paid my first visit to Oxford, and I must confess to feeling very disappointed with a town of which I had heard so much ; this feeling arose a good deal from my

having formed a preconceived idea of the river beauty of the place. I had imagined the gardens of the old Colleges with lawns sloping to the water's edge, and all sorts of picturesque bridges in places. Then again the stone with which the Colleges are built annoyed me greatly by its dreadfully smoky colour, and rotten appearance ; and when I noticed many Tudor mouldings in better repair than work of the days of Queen Anne, of course doubts about their genuine age at once asserted themselves—indeed the whole place seemed to be perpetually having new patches put up all over it.

The only College that came up to my ideal was Magdalen, with its tower and bridge and the little Cherwell wandering by ; the Quad, too, was mossy and grey, and evidently really old. But the poor Isis was very disappointing, looking so muddy and uninteresting ; Folly Bridge to me was little better than some of the bridges on the Paddington Canal. The river certainly gets pretty enough a very short distance from the town, but as for playing a part in the classic beauty of this world-famed city, I can say little for it. The humble Cam at the sister University is highly ornamental, and there is nothing in Oxford comparable to the backs of the Colleges and the bridges at Cambridge. Some of the Colleges too, such as John's, which is built of good honest red brick, and which stands by the water's edge, are far finer than anything at Oxford. I have since visited Oxford several times, and have very considerably modified my opinions about its beauty, but I do not think I have ever quite got over my first impressions.

The year after my stay at Pangbourne, Henley was revisited, and in October of the same year I spent a fortnight at Wargrave with my friend Mr. Marks. We had perfect weather, the grey

morning mists which hung about the river, giving way each day to the sun, the thin sear foliage on the willows softly gleaming out like clouds of gold dust, and in the evening the banks in the lanes bright with numerous glowworms. I made my studies here for my picture called "Willow, Willow," from the banks of the Loddon, which joins the Thames at Shiplake Weir. I remember coming home in the train with an enormous bundle of dried reeds, flags, teasles, reed-mace, loosestrife, and a lot of autumnal things, which were the making of the foreground in that picture. In the evenings Marks and I sometimes made little beacons out of eggshells and bits of candle, which, as they floated along beneath the willows in the back waters, had a very pretty effect, lighting up the weeds they passed with their bright glow.

I had found out by chance about this time some lodgings at Taplow, just above the "Orkney Arms," in a small cottage by the river side, kept by a Mrs. Copeland, and for three or four years I regularly occupied these small rooms during the summer and autumn ; in the winter Mrs. Copeland found another tenant in a gentleman who was very fond of jack fishing. There were two bed-rooms, both exquisitely clean : the smallest one, which I used, looked right out on the river, and had some quaint chairs, and an old-fashioned looking-glass in it ; the other I kept for my friends, and this room was at various times the sleeping apartment of the late Frederick Walker. Mr. Calderon, Mr. Storey, and others have also stopped here with me. Mrs. Copeland was the perfection of a bachelor's landlady. She saved all trouble of ordering dinners, &c., everything that could be desired was carefully provided, her cooking in its humble way was first-rate, and the motherly care she took of us entirely won our hearts ; she had a small strip of garden stretching down to the river, with

a landing place at which I kept my boat. On my second visit to these lodgings I learnt the use of the punt pole, and was at once so captivated by the delights of punting, that I bought myself a punt; it was rather a small one, and very light, and from the thinness of its skin and general shakiness was nicknamed “The Strawberry Pottle.”

The fresh zest which punting gave me for the river was amazing, and a whole world of new pleasures and beauties seemed to open up to me; it was to me a distinct epoch in my river life—all that went before was as it were a sort of apprenticeship. Now, as the possessor of a boat of my own, I esteemed myself as a master mariner, and could claim a sort of kinship with the professional fishermen alongside of whose boats my little punt lay moored.

CHAPTER II.

F. WALKER, A.R.A.—THE COTTAGE AT COOKHAM.—WALKER AND SIR EDWIN LANDSEER.—MONKEY ISLAND.—WALKER'S HABITS AND METHOD OF WORK.—FONDNESS FOR CATS.—DISLIKE OF STEAM LAUNCHES.—HIS DEATH AND BURIAL.—FIELD TALFOURD.—VISITS TO EWELME WITH H. S. MARKS, R.A.—STRUGGLE WITH A SWAN.—MARLOW.—PUNTING EXPEDITION TO OXFORD WITH M. STONE, A.R.A.



HE days I spent at Maidenhead will always remain endeared to my memory, on account of many of them having been passed in the enjoyment of the society^{1/4} of my friend, the late Frederick Walker. On my first year's visit at Mrs. Copeland's, Walker's mother had taken a little cottage at Cookham; it was situated about half way up the main street, on

the right-hand side as you go up from the river to the railway station; to this cottage, Walker himself came frequently. A brother of his, who was consumptive, passed a considerable portion of his time there; he was very fond of fishing, and Walker bought a small punt, which they both

used for that purpose. Walker could throw a fly extremely well, and caught many a chub under the willow boughs. At Cookham he painted one or two of his prettiest water-colour drawings: the "Geese coming up the Village Street," and "The Ferry at Marlow," amongst others. And it was between here and Marlow that he painted his celebrated



THE HURLEY BIRD

picture of "The Bathers;" he worked by fits and starts, and would frequently go down to the river in the late autumn, or even winter, for some detail which he wanted. I have a little pen-and-ink sketch, which came from him on one of these late autumn campaigns; it is called by him "The Hurley Bird," and represents him in gaiters working away on his picture, which is propped up with a boat-hook. In the foreground is his boat, with a small boy huddled up in a great-coat; this

small boy would no doubt have to strip every now and then, to stand as his model, for the picture was the one of the boys bathing.

Walker was singularly averse to talking about his art, but the few remarks he did make, were always true, and well worth remembering ; he was very shy in showing his work to anyone, and when he did do so, his nervousness about criticism was extreme. At the time I saw most of him, I had also the advantage of being very intimate with Sir Edwin Landseer, and over and over again was struck by the similarity both of disposition and surroundings of these two artists. Though neither of them was married, each had in his domestic circle those who almost idolized them, who supplied all their wants, and studied their comfort and convenience in every way.* This self-devotion on the part of their relations was accepted by the lords and masters with an almost imperious graciousness, neither of them appearing in the least conscious when he gave any extra trouble. Both were accustomed to change their minds, without the possibility of being called

* I am sorry to say that the dearly loved sisters of these two great artists have since both died. Miss Walker did not survive her brother many months, and indeed, never recovered her loss ; and in the autumn of 1880 Miss Landseer died at Folkestone, where she had gone for her health. Of the remarkable family of the Landseers, Miss Jessie Landseer was one of the brightest ornaments. The patient tenderness of her devotion to her brother Edwin is well-known to those intimate with her ; her unselfishness and large-heartedness struck me at times as something quite heroic ; she was shrewd and clever, had a strong sense of humour, was an excellent judge of people's character, and above all deeply religious. The skill and tact with which she managed her brother's house never failed. Sir Edwin was extremely attached to her. He had a habit when in his studio of sending her little pencil notes about anything he wished to inform her. On one occasion I recollect when a letter had been brought to him, announcing the death of a very dear friend, he with tears in his eyes wrote to his sister to tell her of it, and request that nothing should be said about it at dinner.

to account, and were equally intolerant of any blunders or mistakes that might chance to occur. This was the weak side of their characters; on the other hand, each had a most affectionate disposition, and hearts that were tender and very sensitive.

Sir Edwin was extremely fond of poetry, of nature, of the drama, and of music; he possessed a very fine ear, and though he had not much voice, sang with great sweetness, and with so much feeling, that the tears would often well up in his eyes at the same time.

Walker also loved poetry, nature, and the drama; he played the flute with exceeding grace, but he too had so little command over his feelings, that he had constantly to leave off with the tears in his eyes; on this account he could hardly ever be persuaded to perform before company. He resembled Sir Edwin, too, in his shyness about showing his work to anyone. I feel quite sure that each burnt with an unquenchable desire to surpass in the art every one of his contemporaries. Walker himself admitted this to me in conversation one evening at Cookham. "My ambition," said he, "is to be the top of all, and if I live, I will."* Sir Edwin considered

* This wish of the young artist was, to a certain extent, afterwards fulfilled, for when the Royal Commissioners were engaged in arranging for the representation of British Art, at the International Exhibition in Paris, 1878, it appeared desirable to them that the more distinguished of the English artists should exhibit an extra number of works. In order to ascertain those who should constitute this privileged class, a voting paper was forwarded to all the members of the Royal Academy, and of the other societies of Artists, as well as to a large body of independent members of the profession, with a request that they would fill in the names of the eighteen artists, in respective order of merit, whom they deemed fittest for the honour. A large majority of these papers were filled up and returned to the Commissioners, and the result of the votes thus obtained placed, at the head of the selected eighteen, the name of Frederick Walker.

that in his case he had attained his desire, but late in life he worried himself painfully with fears of losing his high position.

Walker spent three or four weeks with me at Mrs. Copeland's; we usually punted down each day to Monkey Island, where there was the great attraction to him of two or three trout to be seen; he never succeeded in taking any of these, though he caught many large chub. There was one large trout seen daily, turning over and over just off the shoal at the top of the island, and here Walker had his punt moored, and commenced a very beautiful oil picture, of a boy fishing. It was never finished, and at his death I became the possessor of it; though unfinished, it is truth itself in the rendering of river effect. The clay cliff, with its rat holes, is perfect, and the shimmer of moving water finely expressed; there is something quite pathetic, too, in the little phantom of a boy, so like in some way to poor Walker himself, casting his line with much grace and eagerness. I remember well how uncomfortably he worked on this picture, which was propped up very insecurely in the boat, his tubes of colour, rags, and benzine bottle, all contained in a punt scoop; and as he had forgotten his palette, he used a small bit of varnished wood, which belonged as a backboard to my punt. He had his rod and line beside him, stopping work many times, to cast over the large trout's nose; his boy Collins waited on him as his slave, and had to stand barefoot in the water, whenever Walker wished.

He had with him at that same time a large canvas with a commencement of a Thames bank on it, done, I believe, at Streatley. On this bank was a group of boys fishing; the method with which this picture was begun was very curious, and

was one he was fond of at that period ; the whole effect was laid in with the strongest yellow pigments—aureoline, cadmium, lemon-yellow, and burnt sienna. So rich was the effect, or “fat,” as he called it, that a touch of black and white on it looked quite blue by the contrast. On this picture he worked a little furtively, in a small creek just below Monkey Island, putting in a lot of beautifully-touched forget-me-nots, and other bank flowers ; it was never finished, and the canvas remained for some time at Mrs. Copeland’s. I believe he afterwards converted this canvas into another picture, which likewise, at his death, remained unfinished ; it was to have been a large reproduction, in oil, of a water-colour he had painted, called “The Mushroom Gatherers.” This large unfinished canvas is now in my possession, and I often fancy that through the surface painting I can distinguish some of the bank flowers that I remember him painting on at Monkey Island. There are the traces of two figures of girls in one corner, which have been scratched out in one of his fastidious moods, and the whole remains a vast dreary blank field, with a mournful and brooding sentiment about it. To me, its beauty is the poetic feeling it seems to convey of Earth, Mother Earth. One can imagine easily the weight of the whole world, beneath the finely toned grass.

In these days he would break off work continually to fish, and kept his slave boy always ready to punt him about for that purpose. I altered our dinner hour from seven to eight, to suit his convenience ; but even then, he came home still later, and so we at length called it supper, and had a cold repast instead of a hot one. He generally had caught two or three large chub ; at supper, I remember working on his feelings, about the

cruelty of fishing, which he defended very well indeed, by the usual arguments, but afterwards, he and I used to take a lantern, and go and let all his fish have their liberty ; it was rather fun, as it is one thing to hold a fish straight off the hook in an exhausted and drowning condition, and quite another to catch him in your hands, when he has recovered his strength, in the well of a punt.

Mrs. Copeland had a number of cats ; there are generally a good many to be seen at all river-side cottages, perhaps on account of their love of fish. Hers were very remarkable, and a black one named "Old Granny," with a white face, was marvellously clever at catching fish out of the river ; at one time she brought indoors a fine eel, caught in this way.

Walker was very fond of cats, and had a degree of influence over them, quite peculiar ; he appeared to understand their language, and by talking to them, could always succeed in attracting their affection towards him—another resemblance in this respect to Sir Edwin Landseer. It might have been, perhaps, slightly owing to the smell of fish on him, but it could not have been this entirely, for I once witnessed his winning a wager of his friend Mr. Marks, who challenged Walker to retain his cat on his lap for half an hour without holding it. The cat in question was a large tom, and in general would suffer no one to nurse him at all. It was most curious to watch how Walker went to work. He gradually attracted the cat towards him, by a variety of little caresses and words, giving it gentle touches every now and then ; confidence was at last gained, and he lifted it occasionally off the ground, replacing it tenderly directly ; finally he raised it quietly on to his knees, and after soothing it for a few minutes, withdrew his hands. The time was noted,

the cat subsided into a steady doze, and Walker won his bet with great applause, amidst which the cat disappeared from the room with alarm.

Walker had a little black cat called “Eel-eye,” and this when a kitten was introduced into Mr. Millais’ picture of “The Flood;” the little black thing is painted wonderfully, mewing in great alarm on the top of the child’s cradle. I need not say it was an excellent likeness.

Walker, as a fisherman, had the greatest dislike to the steam launches, which at this time were becoming a rising nuisance, and it was whilst with me that, stung with anger, he made his clever drawing for “Punch,” entitled “Captain Jinks of the ‘Selfish,’ and his friends, enjoying themselves on the River.” He was most fastidious about this work, rehearsing it many times before he was satisfied; sometimes, it would look to him as though he had taken too much pains with it, and he carefully endeavoured to give it an air of ease and carelessness. Then all the ugliest and most disagreeable points about the affair had to be emphasized: the boiler extra large and clumsy, the smoke, the swell, the black-faced engineer, and the guests on board, with their backs to the view, entirely wrapt up in their cigars and brandies and sodas. In rendering the distant landscape, the work becomes entirely tender and finished—it is a beautiful little bit of Bray, with the church and poplars drawn direct from nature; a bridge is introduced, to prevent the scene being too easily recognized. On the opposite bank is a portrait of myself, with easel and picture upset by the steamer’s swell; this mishap had actually occurred to me one day at Monkey Island. Walker watched daily the embarkation of the boat he had selected for his satire, and I recollect him lying on the till of

my punt, taking keen mental notes of the appearance of the captain of the craft ; it reminded me forcibly of a cat watching a bird, hopping about in unconscious ignorance. I was told that three copies of "Punch" were sent to the steam-launch proprietor on the day of publication ; the likeness was very good, and indeed, everyone up and down the river knew it in a moment. This clever bit of satire had no effect, however, in abating the nuisance in any way, and must have fallen like water on a duck's back.

Walker was so pleased with the beauties of Monkey Island, that he afterwards went there by himself, and then it was he painted his grand picture of "The Harbour of Refuge," the subject and background being taken from the old almshouses at Bray. Old Charley,* the lock-keeper at Bray, was a favourite of Walker's, and lately, when I passed through his lock, and informed him of Walker's death, was quite grieved. Walker had likewise a great many humble friends at Cookham, and it was to the cottage of an old fisherman at this place, that his body was taken the night before its interment in the church-yard. This old friend, when first told of poor Walker's death, exclaimed, "What, not the little model!" Anyone who ever knew Walker, and remembers his extremely well-proportioned figure, his neat little hands and feet, and dapper legs, can understand this remark of the old man. Walker was a good rider and swimmer, and I always thought, that with proper care he might have lived a long time, but it was not to be, as at length his excitable and active brain wore out his slender body, and after weakening for a year or two, he passed

* A well-known river character ; I am sorry to say, dead since writing the above.

away from us very suddenly, from an acute attack of inflammation of the lungs. Not an eye was dry amongst the many artistic friends who surrounded, of their own accord, his humble grave in Cookham churchyard. His body had been taken down the night before, in a light cart belonging to the man who built his studio in St. Petersburgh Place, and was carried to the grave from an adjoining cottage by old friends of his in the village.

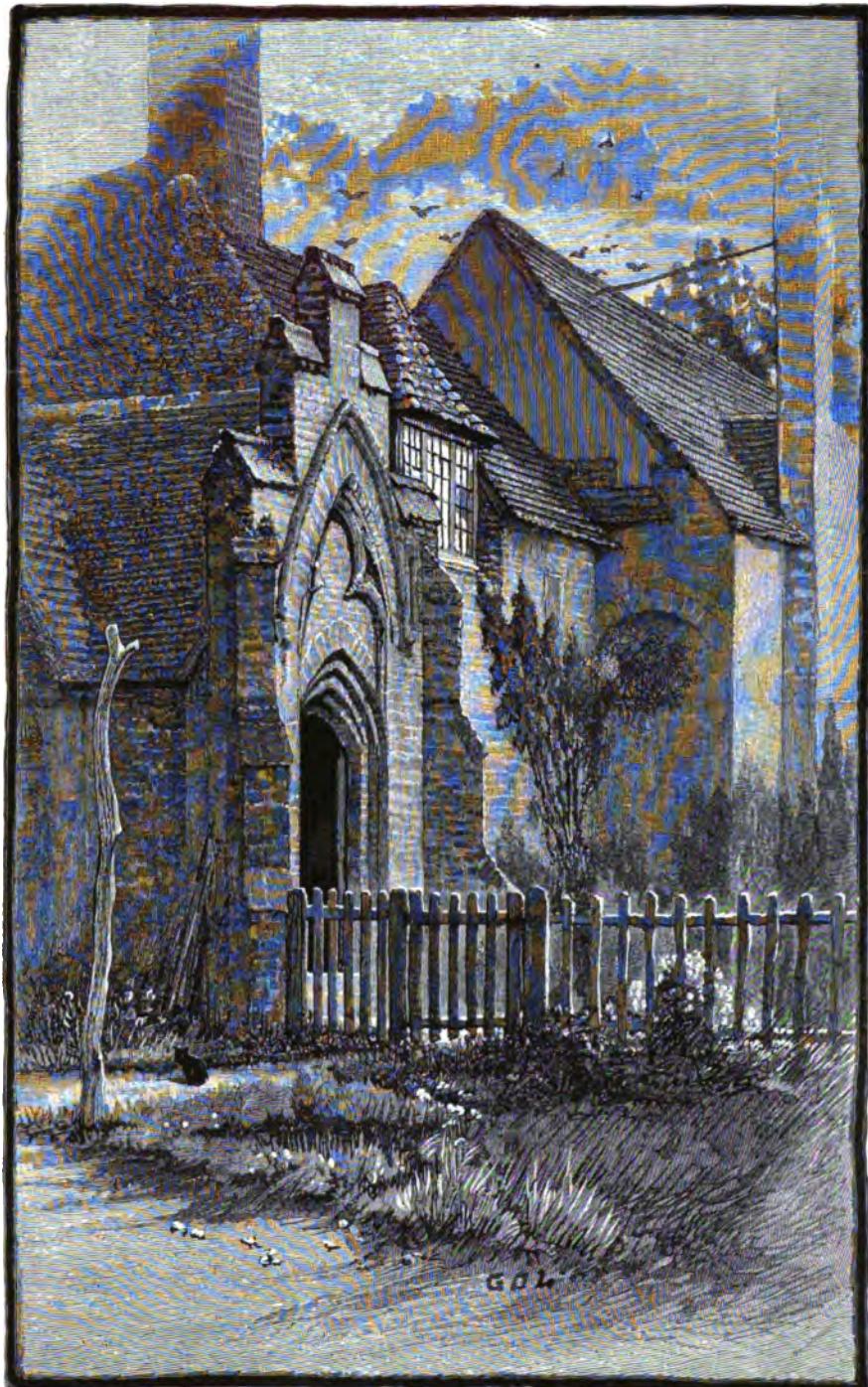
I never pass Cookham without visiting the poor boy's grave, and when in the lock, look up on the sloping bank on which he and I had lain one lovely Sunday afternoon in the happiest and laziest of moods, basking in the warm sun.

Another dear old friend, since also dead, stayed with me, I think, the same year that Walker did. This was Field Talfourd, a younger brother of the Judge. I do not know much of his early life, but he must have roved about considerably, having passed several years as a backwoodsman in Canada, where he told me he earned his living once by making axe-handles, at which he surpassed all his neighbours. Later on he took to portraits in crayon, and on his return to England his high artistic powers were soon recognized by his brother artists. His landscapes and water-colour drawings from the river have always pleased me immensely. One of these I have—a small one—that he made whilst stopping at Mrs. Copeland's with me ; it was taken from the old eel-bucks just above the bridge at Maidenhead. The place is now occupied by a bathing enclosure. This drawing is grey and silvery (as all his were), and has the true charm of Thames about it. Talfourd was a thorough artist in mind, and his conversation on art subjects extremely interesting and sensible ; he had a singularly frank,

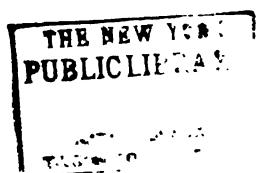
genial manner, and was unselfish and large in all his views ; he was an accomplished boatman, and could send my punt along with the pole or with an oar, which he used in the stern as the Canadians propel their canoes. His hair and moustache were quite white, but very picturesque, and he had a fine manly, handsome head, which will long be remembered by those who had the pleasure of knowing him.

For three years at this time, at the end of the month of May, my friend Mr. Marks and I regularly had a fortnight's sketching together at a place called Bensington, or Benson as it is pronounced by the natives, situated on the Thames, about a mile and a half above Wallingford. There is a beautiful little brook which flows into the river here, of about three miles length from its source in some springs in the Squire's garden at Ewelme to its entry into the river just above Benson Weir ; it flows along chiefly by the side of the lane which connects the two villages of Ewelme and Benson, forming itself at one place into a capital sheepwash, at another spreading out into a valuable watercress bed. Besides watering a number of cottages it turns two mills, where it expands into the usual mill ponds. It passes under many little tunnels and bridges, has one or two small waterfalls, and some trout in places. The foreground in my picture entitled "Fortunes," was taken from this brook, where it flows through Squire Newton's garden at Benson.

The main attractions, however, to Marks and myself were the old almshouses and their inhabitants ; in many respects these are still more picturesque than those at Bray. The covered wooden cloisters at Ewelme, and the staircase which joins the building to the church in which Chaucer's granddaughter, the



Entrance to the Cloisters, Ewelme.



foundress of the almshouses, lies buried, are quite unique in their way. The dwellers in this fine old refuge were also interesting ; one was an old sailor, named Tidmarsh, who had been as a boy in the Battle of the Nile, and afterwards in the action between the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake*. He kept bees, and would sit watching them for hours. Marks made a little portrait of him in this occupation. Tidmarsh's bees swarmed whilst we were at Ewelme, and Marks and I witnessed the operation of hiving them. The old man followed the swarm about with a tin pot and stick to make "the bee music," and when the queen at length settled on a gooseberry bush and had been entirely covered with her subjects, he held an empty hive under the bough and with his bare hand gently brushed the swarm into it. He then placed it on the ground, and covered it with cabbage leaves. He said in reply to our questions, that the bees would not sting him, as they knew he gave them "their vittles in the winter," but he advised us not to come too close.

The bee music is not altogether to please the bees, though it is mentioned as made for that purpose in Virgil. We were told that if a person's bees swarm and settle in a neighbour's garden, the bee master cannot claim his swarm unless he has shown his cognizance of the swarming by sounding the music, and in order to keep up the right of ownership the bees are often followed for a considerable distance by the bee master and his noise. Marks took great delight in these old people, and they were equally fond of him, as were also the village children, for whom we sometimes scrambled halfpennies in the brook; the children dashing recklessly into the water after them. There was rather an eccentric character living up the village,—

a lawyer who was in the habit of placing curiously inscribed tablets on the wall of his house facing the road, one of which I remember ran thus :

" King Bomba was infuriated.
He and his advisers glut with revenge,
But they and his despicable cringers
Have been Garibaldied.
Nickory tasted, post-office tale related
within." And the date.

Another was as follows :

" Mr. —— has also pitchpoled the
Emperor of the Brazils, and rescued
a poor man whose skull had been
savagely broken."
" Mr. —— has no potatoe ground to give the
poor, but he will not show them the fruit
of a black heart."

These, and others equally mysterious, I believe referred to various quarrels and lawsuits which this gentleman had had with his neighbours.* Coming upon these curious inscriptions in the midst of this quiet little corner of the world, with hum of bees, birds' song, and all the sweets of country life around, not forgetting the happy little brook running just in front of this very house, they jarred curiously enough on one's feelings, and served to remind one of the smallness of our natures, and the ridiculousness of our wrangles and disputes.

Our ideas about the peaceful character of pastoral life were also rudely shaken the very evening we arrived at Benson. A village fight took place in front of a pretty little cottage by the

* King Bomba, I was told, referred to the village doctor, and the Emperor of the Brazils was a farmer in the neighbourhood.

brook side ; it was difficult to quite understand the origin of the disturbance, but as far as we could make out, a drunken fellow—a soldier he had been—had returned to his father-in-law's cottage in search of his wife or her goods ; the father-in-law and his son would have nothing to say to him, but knocked him about soundly amidst the screeching of the mother and daughter, the spectators looking on in the quietest manner. We heard that the soldier went off the next morning, and we afterwards saw his wife washing her linen in the little merry brook, looking the very picture of happy rustic simplicity.

There are no good boats or punts to be hired at Benson ; in fact, the village does not join the river, but straggles away at right angles to it, and so Marks and I made very few voyages on it. Once, however, we rowed up to Shillingford and Dorchester, and visited Day's Lock and Little Wittenham, at which last place are the remains of an old convent garden. The yews which formerly made the trim hedges are now grown into tall rows of trees, but the old slopes and terraces can still be distinguished. I took a great fancy to the wild look of the river about here, and after I was married I went there for a couple of months, having found convenient quarters at the Manor House, Dorchester, which adjoined the fine Abbey Church, and had a garden and orchard, with the little river Thame flowing through it. On that occasion my wife and I drove over once or twice to Ewelme, and I was shocked to find how soon so many of the old familiar faces at the almshouses had passed away. There was, however, a fresh supply, doing precisely the same things as formerly, which mainly consisted in leaning over the low wooden wall of the cloisters and gossiping with one another, the old

men in a low, grumbling sort of voice, and the old women in a pleasant, chirruppy tone: this, I have remarked, is a general characteristic of most country people. If you listen to the sound of their voices as they pass by in the lanes, the men always seem to talk in a gruff, grumbly manner, whereas the women's voices sound lively and cheerful.

There was a large mill-pond at the end of the garden of the "Crown Inn" where Marks and I stayed at Benson, and I recollect a memorable struggle with a savage swan, which Marks had one evening. The bird was enraged with my little dog "Dowski," and as the dog retreated behind Marks, the swan attacked him on the bank with outstretched wings. The distinguished bird-painter was equal to the occasion, and with presence of mind he seized the swan by the neck, held him down, and the two in the struggle rolled over into a deep ditch. Marks was out again very soon; but the swan could not extricate itself, and we had to prod it along with long poles to a place where the bank sloped. The bird seemed a good deal astonished, but by no means cowed; and every time we passed along the path by the pond, he attempted to repeat his attacks. Of course we were usually prepared, and armed ourselves with lumps of mould, with which we managed to drive him off. I have never met with swans of this savage character on the river; but perhaps it is owing to the cruel hopping or upping to which they are yearly subjected, and which, no doubt, endues them with a discreet respect for men in general.

Mrs. Copeland's little front parlour during my stay there had a great variety of distinguished visitors. Amongst the rest I recollect the greater part of the "Punch" staff. They were down for a day on the river, and a dinner at Skindle's; and just

as I was having my tea, I caught sight of one or two well-known faces outside my window. They all came in at my invitation, and completely filled the small room. My friend Mr. Storey very often took up his quarters with me ; and, on one occasion, Mr. Calderon and Mr. Storey both occupied the spare bed-room at the same time. One day, lunching with Calderon at the "Complete Angler" at Marlow, we were very much amused by an old Swiss waiter named "Steiner," who chatted away in broken English and French. After lunch, as we were about to leave, I bothered him by demanding "le petit Guillaume"—Anglicè, the little bill. Poor old Steiner I saw again on the occasion of a sort of second honeymoon which I spent at Marlow. Having complained to him of the thinness of some pea soup, he said, "Ah ! I see, not enough of the nature of the pea in it." He is since dead ; and on my last visit to the "Angler" I was served by a common-place London waiter. The little coffee-room, too, had been papered fresh with a modern æsthetic wall-paper—the steady march of culture and taste is so fast and unflinching everywhere !

Just opposite the door of the little coffee-room of the "Complete Angler," on the other side of the river, is the landing-place, at the end of an old street of Great Marlow, which has been immortalized by Walker as the background of his most beautiful water-colour drawing called "The Ferry :" a boy rowing a girl across, and just reaching the shore. There are swans on the water : * the street, with its quaint old houses, is bathed in the warm glow of the afternoon sun. Against a wall is a group of old village gossips, each perfect in individuality, and keeping up

* This street formerly led to an old wooden bridge which crossed the river here.

a “feeble chirrup,” as Homer describes the aged Trojans on the walls of Troy, “like balm crickets on a sunny wall.” Children await the arrival of the boat ; and the action of the boy rowing and turning to look ahead is simply perfect. On the whole, this exquisite little drawing is perhaps the happiest and most beautiful rendering of the upper Thames that was ever painted. The admirers of Walker would look in vain for the scene from which this drawing was taken. All is now altered ; the street still runs down to the water’s edge, but on one side a “ commodious modern dwelling-house in the Jacobean style of architecture,” as the house agent describes it, stands, and has banked up and completely altered the place ; and the street is squeezed up by this house and a new Lodge on the other side. The wooden wall where the old men held their evening chorus, is cold flint now, with string-courses of red bricks and stone facings. A fine old barn, which, I believe, formerly belonged to the Knights Templars, has also lately been pulled down. It stood just above the Suspension Bridge ; and its foundations gave its destroyers plenty of trouble.

It was on one of my last visits to Maidenhead, that I had a most delightful voyage in the “Strawberry Pottle” up the river, in company with Mr. Marcus Stone ; we went as far as we could, right up above Oxford, until the river became entirely choked with weeds, and navigation impossible. It had been a very hot dry summer, and the weeds were more numerous than I ever remember to have seen ; above Oxford the trouble of going through the weirs was also great, as there were only one or two regular pound locks, and at last we gave in and turned homewards. I enjoyed this journey very much, as it was the first long expedition I had made in a punt, and I found

it a most delightful boat for travelling in ; we were very lucky in the weather, and often favoured by a fair wind.

In Stone's company, I liked Oxford much better than on my first visit, as he knew the place well, and pointed out a great many beauties which had escaped my attention. On a Sunday when we were there, I happened to want some lights for my pipe, and we entered a small tobacconist's shop to get some, and there spent nearly half-an-hour in conversation with the proprietor, a Jew ; truly the Hebrew dealer understands the art of making himself fascinating and sympathetic with his customers, in a manner quite unknown to the Philistine. This one asked us where we came from, how far we were going, and displayed the keenest interest in our welfare ; there was a fly-paper lying carelessly on a handsome old blue Nankin plate, and on my remarking that it was too good a piece of china for such a purpose, our friend instantly asked if we cared for china, and proceeded to show us a quantity of choice old blue of a tempting character, the prices of which would not now be considered exorbitant. Stone asked him if he by chance had a particular sort of old gipsy ring, for which he was on the look-out ; and the Jew at once produced trays full of jewellery, talking about them and their values in the most amusing manner ; he had not however the sort of ring required, and in the end we bade him good-bye, without having bought anything more than the box of lights. He was nevertheless polite to the last, and wishing us a happy voyage, we parted the best of friends. One little touch of caution on his part deserves to be mentioned : all the time we were there, his son, a small sharp-eyed boy, was hanging about in the rear and kept up a careful but unobtrusive watch on us whenever his father happened to leave the

counter to fetch more treasures. There was nothing about the external nature of the shop to indicate the variety of its contents ; it was simply an ordinary tobacconist's—I have no doubt well known to the undergraduates ; and I trust, for the sake of my old friend the proprietor, that he did no worse than administer to the smoking propensities and æsthetic tastes of his young customers.

Our journey down was as happy as the upward one ; we managed to travel fourteen or fifteen miles a day easily, but it was all done without fatigue, stopping wherever and whenever we liked, which is the true way of enjoying the beauty of the river. My friend Stone was not able to take his turn at the pole, but good-naturedly did his share of the work in tracking ; we visited Ewelme as we passed Benson, and stopped at Abingdon, Wallingford, Pangbourne, and Sonning. I left my punt at Henley, as I meant to spend a few days with my mother, who had at that time come to live in a small cottage on the top of Remenham Hill.

I did not altogether desert my pleasant lodgings at Mrs. Copeland's, but paid her occasional visits the following year. A good many of my adventures and experiences at Maidenhead, which I have omitted here, will be found in other chapters.

CHAPTER III.

MY MOTHER'S COTTAGE AT HENLEY.—MY FATHER'S JOURNEY TO OXFORD WITH WASHINGTON IRVING.—WARGRAVE.—AN ACCOMPLISHED AMATEUR.—F. WALKER IN ALGIERS.—WINTER SCENES.—A SUMMER FLOOD.—VISIT TO MONKEY ISLAND WITH MR. J. E. HODGSON, R.A.—POULTRY.—MY NEW PUNT.—MARLOW.—MRS. COPELAND'S DEATH.—VISIT TO DORCHESTER.—STREATLEY.—SUMMONED FOR EVADING THE BRIDGE TOLL.—G. MASON, A.R.A., AT THAMES DITTON.—THE "GEORGE AND DRAGON" SIGNBOARD.—JOURNEY TO ST. JOHN'S WOOD IN MY PUNT.—THE LOWER RIVER.—YEWDEN.—REMENHAM HILL.—JOURNEY TO ABINGDON.—FLOODS IN 1879.



N THE summer of the year 1869 my mother came to live at Henley, having taken a small cottage on Remenham Hill on the Berkshire side of the river—more than forty years before which time, on the evening of her wedding day, she and my father arrived by coach at Henley, where they stopped at the "Lion" for a few days on their way to Oxford and Blenheim. In those days, as many as forty coaches

sometimes passed along the road in front of her present house, the sound of their horns enlivening the neighbourhood as they reached the top of the hill overlooking Henley; and it was on

the same road that some years before, my father travelled in company with Washington Irving, on which journey the story of "The Stout Gentleman" was suggested by a fellow traveller of corpulent dimensions, who was in the coach with them. My father once or twice described this journey to me. It took place in the latter part of the month of August, the moon shining so brightly that the labourers were at work in the fields all night getting in the fat harvest. A sailor travelled with them who had been in the actions of Trafalgar and the Nile, and who had many exploits to relate; he put on nothing extra in the way of clothing as night approached, and on my father asking if he was not cold, Jack replied, "No, sir; I have a great-coat, but it is stowed away in the hold, and it is not worth while getting it out." He had a cutlass wound in his head so deep, that he could put his two fingers into it; he told how the crew of his ship, having received their Trafalgar medals, went off for a day's liberty; not five returned to their ship next day who had retained their medals. Poor Jack, it was ever thus!

Soon after my mother came to reside at Henley, my friend Mr. Calderon took a house on the Remenham Hill near to my mother's; he kept a punt on the river, and for several years regularly brought his family down to this country house for the summer months. My brother-in-law at the same time bought a pretty little cottage at Wargrave, which had belonged to Henry Kingsley the novelist; and so it came to pass that Henley became my head-quarters on the river. I brought my punt up, and spent my summers there. The punting at Henley itself is not good, as the water is deep and the bottom muddy, but at Wargrave and

Hambledon it is very good, and I soon began to like the place very much.

Through my brother-in-law I became acquainted with Miss Jekyll, then living at Wargrave; a young lady of such singular and remarkable accomplishments, that I cannot resist giving my readers some account of her various occupations and pursuits. Clever and witty in conversation, active and energetic in mind and body, and possessed of artistic talents of no common order, she would have at all times shone conspicuously bright amongst other ladies. The variety of her accomplishments, however, is far more extensive; there is hardly any useful handicraft the mysteries of which she has not mastered —carving, modelling, house-painting, carpentry, smith's work, repoussé work, gilding, wood-inlaying, embroidery, gardening, and all manner of herb and flower knowledge and culture, every thing being carried on with perfect method and completeness.

Her artistic taste is very great, and if it had not been for the extreme near-sightedness of her vision, I have little doubt that painting would have predominated over all her other talents.

To give my readers an instance of the originality and ingenuity of her ideas, I may relate the method she took to enliven and improve the outlook of the windows of her brother's rooms in town. The prospect from these windows was nothing more or less than the dreary top of a wall of the Bridewell. She contrived a little scoop at the end of a long rod, with which good soil was conveyed by instalments on to the top of the wall, and afterwards the seeds of such things as she thought might grow there, so that her brother

might amuse himself by watching them. I am sorry to say the plan did not succeed quite as well as they could wish; whether it was on account of the blighted character of the precinct, the rain, London smoke, cats or sparrows, I cannot say.

Her garden at Wargrave was a perfect wilderness of sweets, and old-fashioned flowers bloomed there in the greatest profusion; there were lavender hedges of marvellous growth, and the generous way she, with a lavender sickle of her own construction, reaped me an armful, I shall long remember with grateful admiration.

She showed great kindness to poor Walker in Algiers, where he broke down in health, and became very despondent and home-sick; she tended him with her kind strong help, and when she and her friends were leaving Algiers, he was invited to accompany them; she looked after his luggage, assisted him in every way, and brought him home almost like a poor stray kitten under her arm. At times, he felt as though he should never reach home, and remarked to her, "that if only he were once again in a hansom cab in London, he should be quite happy." And at Charing Cross, when she resigned her charge, she said to him, "There, Mr. Walker, this is Charing Cross, and there is a hansom cab."

One thing about her was singular to me, and it was, that she did not care for the part of the country where she lived, going very little on the river, except for the purpose of collecting some particular wild flowers. She hated the magnificent view from her windows, partly on account of a glimpse of Huntley and Palmer's biscuit manufactory chimneys at Reading, which showed in the distance. She had, too, a distinct prejudice to a chalky

soil, and some years since moved to a more congenial home amidst the Surrey hills.*

As my mother lived at Henley now all the year round, I had frequent opportunities of seeing the river in the winter, during floods, frosts, and snow ; and it was to me a new sensation to walk along the Wargrave Road, to see the fields and hills covered with snow, and to look down on the drab-brown river curdling along in distended courses, and thundering over the weir at Marsh Lock, the edges of the stream crowded with rooks and all manner of wild fowl ; these birds I take it were after the worms which are driven out of the ground by the floods, and which must in the general exodus from the flooded parts abound in large numbers along the margin of the water.

The overflowed portions sometimes become frozen, and afford capital safe fields of vast extent for skating. It is no joke to take a punt across the river in a flood of this

* The following extract from a letter from Miss Jekyll explains her apparent want of sympathy with Berkshire scenery :—

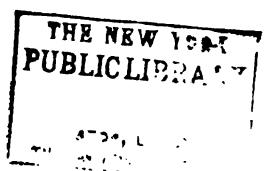
“ It is quite true that I never cared for that part of the country, but I was quite sensible of its beauties. I admired it, but had no sympathy with it. All my younger life was spent in this county (Surrey), with its great tracts of wood and heathland, beautiful wild ground and soil of bright yellow sand and rock. The eight years I lived in Berkshire were just so long a time of what felt like exile—a perpetual homesickness and inability to be acclimatized. You see I only hated Berkshire because it was not Surrey, and chalk because it was not sand, just as poor Walker when he grew ill and wretched, hated Algiers because it was not Bayswater. Further, I must explain that I had no personal dislike to the biscuit-making chimneys—on the contrary, I thought their perpendicular lines were rather pleasant in the distant valley ; but I do own to a feeling of irritation when *every visitor* looking at the view found it necessary to tell me that those were Huntley and Palmer’s chimneys ! This continual reiteration was annoying, and made me wish them out of sight and mind. When I knew you at Wargrave I was very little on the river because I had no boat to my mind ; I had always used a little sea-boat, like a yacht’s dingey, in my old home, and in early salt-water days, and I had a great dislike to those long awkward river skiffs. The first year I was at Wargrave a little tub, such as I like, was lent me, and I was always on the river.”

description, and I admired immensely the art with which young Wyatt put us over, first taking advantage of the eddies up by the lawns, and then swinging across, the boat simply held at the right angle with a strong arm and pole, and brought up to the opposite bank, a bank all ragged and formidable with large icicles, and frozen snowbergs, which in summer time, one knew covered with meadow sweet, loosestrife, comfrey, and all the rest of the beautiful river weeds. In some very bad floods, the fishermen tell me it is a piteous sight to see the poor water rats, hanging like bunches of grapes to the willow boughs on the eyots, flooded out of their holes, and almost starved. I have lately often witnessed both summer and winter floods. They are particularly bad at Oxford and Maidenhead; the country for miles and miles at these places being sometimes one vast lake. I remember seeing a row of cottages at Oxford, through which the river literally flowed, running in at the front doors, which were all open, and flowing out at the back.

I experienced a remarkable summer flood at Wargrave, in the year 1875, which I rather enjoyed than otherwise. I could punt pretty well then, and delighted to battle up against the stream and take my punt under the willows of an eyot by the lock at Shiplake; the ground itself was entirely under water, and the sun shining through the bright green leaves, with the strong stream below, was a curious experience. The hay was quite spoilt, the birds came in crowds to the water's edge, and the cattle were hemmed in on any little triangles of elevated ground that were left to them. During this flood I saw an otter stealing along close by Wargrave Church; the Wyatts told me there were several about, and that they had often shot some in the winter. In punting over a flooded meadow I picked up a



A Summer Flood.



large perch of a pound-and-a-half weight; it was nearly dead, and had four large teeth marks on it, two on each side of its back fin. I have little doubt it must have been seized by an otter, as they were the teeth marks of a carnivorous animal, and could not have been those of a jack, because jacks' teeth are small, and cover the roof of the mouth like a harrow; besides, a jack would never choose a large perch of this description for his prey, as the fins and hard scales are not easy of digestion.

In the spring of the year 1871, I spent a delightful week at Monkey Island, in company with my friend Mr. J. E. Hodgson, R.A. This island is a great resort of the Eton boys; parties of them land on certain days of the week, and have tea, eggs, and other refreshment. There is a certain sort of fascination about this place, partly, I believe, owing to the Robinson Crusoeish character of the island, which makes a short stay on it very enjoyable. The buildings consist of a sort of octagon-shaped cottage, in which is the monkey-room with its ceiling painted with monkeys, a kitchen, and several little sitting and bed-rooms, and at the lower end of the island a small temple-shaped building, full of rich Queen Anne carving; from the windows of the room in it the views are charming; there is a neglected old wooden billiard table in this room. We used this place as a sort of studio, as I had formerly done when here with Walker.

The remains of the Duke of Marlborough's buildings which are left here are all of a stately and ornamental style, and I especially admired the steps down to the landing-place. It was not at all a bad place to stop at ten years ago, as Mrs. Plummer cooked admirably, and the fish were especially nice. The stream is very sharp just here, and the eels, perch, and jack

are in perfect condition, and quite free from the muddy flavour of most freshwater fish. They kept a very large stock of poultry on the island, and eggs were to be obtained in great abundance. Mr. Hodgson and myself were greatly amused in watching the ways and doings of the cocks, hens, and ducks. Some were very tame indeed, and would jump on Miss Plummer's shoulders and feed out of her hand. We dined in one of the little parlours with glass doors opening on to the lawn, and the fowls would come for bits. We enticed them in in great numbers, and when the maid came to remove the dishes, every part of the room would be crowded with poultry. I am a great lover of cocks and hens, and delight in watching their habits. I keep fowls at home, and manage to make them pay well ; but then, on the credit side of their account, I set down a very large item indeed for the amusement and pleasure they afford me. Mine are of the game sort—not exactly the fancy, long-legged, trimmed-up birds that take the cups for game-fowl at the poultry shows, but a fine old strain of English fighting-birds from Cheshire. The cocks are of the most gallant shape and Titianesque colour ; the hens of a beautiful dun, with light golden hackles. They can fly from one end of the garden to the other, like a covey of partridges. There is a curious habit that I have noticed amongst hens, which takes place when a hen that is strange is introduced to her companions ; of course, frequently a very bloody battle will ensue, but that is not the habit I mean. When a hen feels itself too small and weak to attempt a battle, it will approach the other with a humble expression, and holding its head down, will remain perfectly motionless whilst the other hen pecks it lightly on the comb two or three times. After this the two are friends, only it is

always understood that the weaker one takes rank beneath the other. I have seen this happen so very often, that I am sure it is a regular custom—a sort of swearing fealty to a master, not unlike the customs of barbarous nations. When a rook or other bird flies across the poultry-yard, the cock gives a curious shrill alarm cry, evidently as a sort of warning in case of hawks.

A brood hen, when she gets off the nest for food or an earth bath, runs about like a demented thing, receiving pecks on every side. Two old hens of mine have a habit of getting broody late in the summer, when I no longer wish for chickens ; they sit persistently on the nest eggs, two of which I allow them in their nest ; they sit together, forming a sort of "company limited" for hatching china eggs. It is astonishing how the other hens testify their faith in this company by investing eggs in it every day, which of course are removed. These hens go on in this queer partnership for nearly three months, time being no object ; they never leave the nest at the same time for refreshment : when at length the moulting season begins and I turn them out, curiously enough they then resume laying for a short time. In the case of game fowl any more than one cock is out of the question on account of their fighting propensities, but amongst ordinary poultry two or three cocks will live peaceably enough. At Monkey Island there were a very great number of Dorking cocks of all sizes and ages, and very amusing it was to notice how perfectly well aware each was of the rank he held with regard to the others ; the hens were sad flirts, and every now and then some young pullet would get enticed away from the main flock by the blandishments and endearing calls of one of the humbler cocks. Monkey Island is a capital place at which

to practise punting, as in making the circuit of the island every possible difficulty is encountered. The landlord's daughters were famous hands at punting, and the younger one generally worked the ferry.

The Eton boys came up in the afternoon, I think on Thursdays. I liked the fashionable swagger of these happy youngsters, the patronising way in which they ordered their refreshment, and the endless skylarking which they carried on ; the poultry and dogs too appeared to know them well, and had a way of hiding themselves whenever the boys were about. The Hotel is very primitive in its accommodation, and the place is rather rough and uncultivated, but I would not wish it altered for anything, as the moment the place becomes more fashionable the quaint charms of the island will vanish for ever.

In the summer of 1871 two events happened to me of some importance, namely, I got married, and I bought a new punt. Of my wife I do not here propose to say anything, but the punt was such a beauty when new, and has been such a faithful and trustworthy friend ever since, that I cannot forbear giving a slight description of her. She was built by Woodhouse, of Bray, who is now to be found at Raymede, near Maidenhead. I have never seen better boats than he turns out ; mine is calculated chiefly for shoving capabilities, and is slimmer and more elegant than an ordinary fisherman's punt. She is between 2 and 3 inches longer than most other punts ; her sides are two long slabs of mahogany, with no join in them. Her floor is deal, and the treads and knees are good oak and very strong ; the swim is long and graceful. She is not very light, as her sides are inch stuff ; I think this no objection, as,

besides rendering her stiffer and more durable, she keeps way on her between each shove better for being a little heavy. A light punt, such as most amateurs like, does not in the long run travel so fast as a heavier one, and I could very soon manage to pass any of these light punts if I wished. I learnt this in trying conclusions once with the fisherman, Ned Andrews, at Bray. He was in his heavy fishing punt with all his gear on board and a wet well, and I was in "The Strawberry Pottle." I could send my light boat up level with his over and over again, and seemed to dart forwards far quicker each time, but I could never pass him, my speed having an unpleasant way of stopping short as I walked forward. He complimented me on my endeavours, but I never tried to race a fisherman again in my light punt. I have since passed a professional in my new boat once or twice, and I have also prevented them from passing me when I thought they were trying to do so, but it is very hard work, and I prefer to keep up in a friendly way far better.

The sides of my boat are not too low and are rather upright, which in punting has some advantages, and they are better in this respect for screwing my easel to when sketching. To complete the list of beauties, there are nothing but brass screws used in her construction ; she has brass plates and bands at the head and stern, and no hinges anywhere in her. Hinges are a great mistake in any boat, as they invariably get out of order, and sooner or later break off ; doors hardly ever shut properly, and locks get rusty and do not fit. The lid of my dry well is one slab of mahogany which lifts right off and enables you at once to get at the whole interior, and the little door in the till merely takes out of its hole, being fastened

with little buttons. I have never the slightest trouble with these lids.

My punt has worn remarkably well, and to all intents and purposes is as good now as when new. I have used her regularly every year since I have had her. In the winter she is taken out of the water and placed under cover, and has a fresh dressing of pitch and tar, her sides are revarnished, and her floor repainted. Once I did this dressing and varnishing myself with hot irons, pitch, and a bonfire, but I had rather a dose of it, as the weather was hot, and shall not in a hurry repeat the experiment. In the year 1877, I brought my punt right down the river from Marlow to Kew, and from thence she was carted to the garden of my house in St. John's Wood, as I wanted to make studies from her for a picture which I thought of painting. I placed models in her and worked from the studio window, but the immense length she looked in proportion to the figures caused me to abandon the subject. I believe boats are never drawn long enough in pictures; from Raphael's "Miraculous Draught of Fishes," to all the recent boat pictures, this mistake has ever been fallen into. Though I failed to make use of the punt as I had anticipated, I was nevertheless very glad to have the dear boat near me all through the winter, and my children delighted in her, as did also one of my hens, who stole a nest underneath her, and brought out a brood of nine fine game chickens in March.

In 1871 I had a delightful month in my boat soon after I was married. We stayed at Marlow at the "Complete Angler." We also paid a short visit to my old friend Mrs. Copeland. I have been to see her frequently since, until her death in the autumn of 1878. The last year of her life

she was seized with a sort of palsy brought on by a fright she got at the noise made one night, by a drunken man quarrelling with his wife, next door to her house. A month or two before she died she fell and broke her leg. Too old to have anything done to it (after remaining bed-ridden for some time), she at length, about Christmas time, passed away. All who knew her were very sorry to hear of her death, and I shall remember her long as one of the best and kindest friends I ever had.

She gave each of my children some old silver things at their christenings, and just before she died she sent me a basket with several treasures that she had stored up. A very pretty little silver cream jug, her silver mug, and some old china amongst other things, which I shall long keep in remembrance of the happy days I spent in her little cottage.

In the second year of my married life, 1872, I passed some weeks at Henley, and the year following I spent the months of July and August at the Manor House at Dorchester. Close to the house was the Abbey Church, which was at that time being restored, and I am happy to be able to state that, owing to rather a short supply of money, not very much spoilt under the operation. There is a wonderfully good butcher's shop at Dorchester, and I recommend any boat travellers or campers, who know what a good steak should be, to land there, and get one.

The church at Little Wittenham, just above Day's Lock, is very pretty. Mr. Marks and I walked into it, on an excursion we made from Benson ; the doors were wide open, no one was to be seen anywhere, and the interior smelt deliciously with the perfume of lilac blossom, bunches of which, with peonies, were

placed in large green glass vases, in the deep embrasures of every window.

In the summer of 1874 my wife and I visited Streatley, the beauties of which are so attractive to the artist fraternity. Whilst here I was one day summoned by the toll-keeper on the bridge, for evading the toll. I went daily across the river in my punt, to sketch on the opposite bank ; and as this was done within a mile of the bridge, the man charged me with evading the toll, according to the reading of an old Act of Parliament.

I was advised that it was a claim that could not be maintained, and I determined to fight it out ; accordingly I appeared before the magistrates at Reading to answer the summons in person ; when, after reading the Act, and considering the case, the Bench gave it against my summoner, and he had to pay thirteen shillings costs.

It was a most absurdly arranged Act, for it appeared that a man driving cattle or other beasts, paid nothing for himself, and only a halfpenny a head for the cattle, the toll being for an ordinary traveller one penny ; so a farmer on the Goring side told me he meant to keep a little pig handy, and when he wanted to cross, to drive him over, thus saving a halfpenny each time. It would also appear by the strict letter of the Act, that if any one who was towing a boat up the river, should get into the boat to cross over, or walk across the gates of the lock where the tow-path changed sides, he would be liable for evading the toll of the bridge ; this case, they told me, had been tried several times, and had always failed.

The reach above Cleve Lock has a doubly mournful interest to me, as the scene of two fatal accidents, one resulting in the death of Edwin Field, and the other in that of Alfred Constable,

a son of John Constable, R.A. The scene of poor Field's accident was in the reach between Cleve and Moulsford, very near the "Beetle and Wedge"; the reach is a very enticing one for sailing, and I remember Field telling me how much they enjoyed it, carrying full sail in a strong breeze, without fear, as they could all swim so well. This he told me once at Reading railway station, not very long before the accident, and I remember at the time thinking it rather a risky thing to do.

Soon after our visit to Streatley, I went with my friend Mr. Yeames to spend a day with G. Mason, who was living for a month or two at a small house at Thames Ditton, belonging to the Hon. Percy Wyndham, and after lunch, I punted Mason and Yeames up to Hampton Court, where we enjoyed the pictures together.

Mason was very well all that day, and in his best spirits. On our way back I recollect his admiring a bit of the bank opposite the Palace gardens; it was a gentle sloping bank, with a few rather slim and scantily grown willows on it. Mason said he should make a study of it, and he did so, for at the sale of his works—alas! so very soon after this—there was a sketch of this very spot, and remembering our happy day on the river I bid vigorously for it, but noticing Sir Frederick Leighton bidding against me, I desisted, as I knew that he was seeking to obtain it for Mason's family. I have no doubt it must have been one of the very last things he ever painted, and on this account Mrs. Mason wished to preserve it. The little study possessed another interest, as it was taken from the very river bank afterwards saved from the utilitarian grasp of the Chelsea Water Works Company, mainly by the energy and skill of Mr. Alfred Marks (a brother of the Academician), who lived at

Ditton, and who wrote several admirable letters to the papers on the subject, and was made the Honorary Secretary of the River Bank Defence Committee.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without saying a few words about George Mason. I knew him only during the latter years of his life, and there is nothing I regret more than that, owing to my lazy habits, I did not see nearly as much of him then as I might easily have done.

Mason was one of the most thorough artists I ever knew, and I came away from an evening spent in his company with a feeling of having spent it with Titian himself. There was an indescribable glamour about him, a loveableness and a gentleness, a perfect knowledge of art and artists, a keen sense of humour, and an utter absence of any of the petty jealousy and envy which so frequently mar the characters of men of genius. He was as simple as a child, and yet one could not help feeling how intimate he was with the highest secrets of his profession. I well remember his saying in a plaintive way that, if he could only put what he knew into a healthy body with young eyes, he would paint the best pictures ever seen!

The enjoyment and eagerness with which he looked at the works of the old masters, and the way he could talk about them and display their beauties, was a thing to be remembered by any one who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. Especially do I recollect an afternoon in Rathbone Place with him, looking through the autotypes from Michael Angelo, the fun and enjoyment afterwards of dining with him at the little foreign restaurant in Soho, and on walking home the delight he took in watching the numbers of little groups of ragged children skipping and playing in the gutters.

We little thought that day at Ditton how soon we should be standing round his grave in Brompton Cemetery.

The year after our Streatley sojourn we made Wargrave our summer quarters, and it was on this visit that the before-mentioned flood took place.

The weather was singularly bad during our entire stay ; I managed to have plenty of punting, however, as sketching was almost out of the question. It was during our stay at Wargrave this year that my friend Mr. Hodgson and I repainted Mrs. Wyatt's signboard for her—the “George and Dragon.” I painted my side first, a regular orthodox St. George on a white horse, spearing the dragon. Hodgson was so taken with the idea of painting a signboard that he asked me to be allowed to do the other side, to which I of course consented, and as he could only stop at Wargrave one day he managed to do it on that day ; indeed it occupied him little more than a couple of hours. The idea of his composition was suggested by Signor Pellegrini, the well-known artist of “Vanity Fair ;” the picture represented St. George, having vanquished the dragon, and dismounted from his horse, quenching his thirst in a large beaker of ale. These pictures were duly hung up soon after, and very much admired ; they have since had a coat of boat varnish, and look already very old masterly. Hodgson's, which gets the sun on it, is a little faded, but mine, which faces the north towards Henley, still looks pretty fresh.

There were some paragraphs about this sign in “The World,” the editor of which was staying at Wargrave at the time, and one of these was printed in gold type, and presented to Mrs. Wyatt, and hangs up in the inn parlour. This is the second signboard I have painted, the first being the “King

Harry" at St. Stephen's, near St. Albans. Miss Jekyll has painted several about the neighbourhood of Wargrave, and on the occasion of my doing this one, about which she was much interested, she lent me her own large pot of white lead. The sign of the "Swan" at Pangbourne was executed by a friend of mine, Mrs. Seymour Trower, whilst she was staying on the river there, and is a great success, both in drawing and colour.

In the spring of 1876, I unfortunately sprained my knee, which prevented me from exercising myself in my favourite boat. I was down at Henley in the autumn for a short time, but had very little boating; the next year I made up for my abstinence by having a good long spell of river at Marlow, a place which in some respects I think the most interesting of any on the river. Nothing can be finer than the Quarry Woods, and the islands and back waters, Bisham Abbey and Church, Temple Mills, Hurley and Harleyford; as a typical piece of Thames scenery it has no equal in my estimation.

We had fine weather during our stay at Marlow, and I frequently took my two eldest children for a bathe in the river. I punted down through the lock to the little backwater behind the race, as it is called; it is very shallow here, and out of the sight of travellers on the main stream. I swung my punt right across the stream, so that it touched both banks, and was thus held firmly by the current; my little chicks could then safely paddle in water about two feet deep above the boat, and there was no occasion to hold them, as even if they were knocked over by the stream, they must be carried back to the punt again. They enjoyed it very much; when they came out, the floor of the punt, warmed by the sun, was very "comfy" for their feet,

and a luxurious large rough bath towel soon dried them up. I thought this method of bathing far better for children than from a machine at the sea-side, as they were not frightened in the least, and grew quite bold ; they looked so very pretty in the water, the banks on either side fringed with forget-me-nots, the bottom all fine gravel and sand, and the water beautifully clear and sparkling in the sun, that I longed to paint a picture of them, and should have done so, were it not so very very difficult, and quite beyond my powers as an artist to do justice to the scene.

Whilst we were at Marlow Sir Henry Thompson came up the river in a house-boat, and anchored off Bisham. He was very pleased with this reach, and lived in his boat whenever he could get away from town. He is an accomplished cook, and he and his son contrived most excellent dishes on board the boat. I could often in the afternoon, when passing, smell a savoury stew going on. Mr. Alma Tadema came down to see him for a day or two, and they sketched away from the deck of the boat together.

One evening I had been punting Sir Henry about on the river, and on returning to his house-boat, as he was stepping from the punt, he dropped his cigarette case into the water ; it was large and heavy, with a good deal of silver mounting on it, and sank to the bottom directly. There was nothing to be done in the dark, but the next morning he procured the assistance of a diver, the son of a fisherman at Marlow, who after one or two failures brought it up out of 8 feet of water, to the delight of Sir Henry and Tadema.

The lock-keeper told me of a contrivance for seeing down to the bottom of the water. It consists of a long tin

tube with glass at the lower end of it, where it is heavily weighted with lead so as to ensure its sinking. By looking down this all the objects at the bottom of the water become quite visible. Such a contrivance the men who were working at the lock for the Thames Conservancy had, but it was not forthcoming on the occasion of Sir Henry's loss.

At the conclusion of this visit to Marlow, I, with the assistance of my man, brought the punt down the river to Chiswick, from whence she was carted to my house in town. We reached the "Bells of Ouseley" the first day, having started about noon. We managed to sail the greater part of the way, lunching in the boat as we went along. On the next day we reached the "Swan," at Ditton, and on passing Hampton I paid a visit to my old friend Mrs. Snell. The next morning we went on to Chiswick. As I had seen little of the lower part of the river since the time my father lived at Hampton, I was much struck by the great loss of beauty all the way down. The locks and weirs were almost all new, and the tow-path side in most places embanked artificially, large lumps of concrete being laid along the edges beneath the water, which are not very nice for punters, as the pole gets awkward twists between them. The great increase of ugly modern villas along the banks also vexed me much, especially at Staines, Teddington, and Kingston, and huge ugly water-works had been built at Moulsey and Surbiton. One of the most disagreeable objects on the whole journey I noticed when passing the Royal Park at Windsor, where through a small ugly black archway the sewage from the town or Castle found its way, in an entirely unsophisticated condition, right into the river, and I declined the use of the pole until I had passed the lock. Yet here were

quite a number of men in punts fishing for roach, which low-minded fish is taken in great quantities at this spot.

Nothing in cast-iron could well be uglier than the two royal bridges which cross the river here. Surely, with so fine a castle in the background, the idea of good stone or brick bridges might have suggested itself to the proper authorities, whoever they may have been.

At the "Bells of Ouseley" is a very pretty turn of the river, and from here to Magna Charta Island the beauty is quite up to the mark ; but Staines has indeed gone all to the bad with gas-works, railway bridges, dirty houses, and vulgar villas.

Below Penton Hook at Laleham there is an old-fashioned house, on the tow-path side, with garden enclosed by a fine old red-brick wall ; and I liked it perhaps all the better, as out of a little green back gate, three pretty girls without their hats came running down to their boat as I was passing. Penton Hook has a beauty of its own ; the willows grow gracefully and rather thin, reminding one a little of the landscapes in early Italian pictures. There is nothing remarkable in the way of scenery below here until you reach Richmond, the situation of which is naturally so grand that I believe no amount of building could altogether spoil it.

My punt squeezed through the little slip of a lock at Teddington, and floated for her first time on tidal waters. As we got below the bridge at Richmond the tide turned against us, and large strings of barges, towed by ugly black tugs, met us in stately procession, coming up from the great city below. My poor little punt seemed sadly out of her element in the dirty stream ; and I towed along as well as I could until the

tall withies broke my line, and then I had to resume the pole. I did not relish punting in the foul water, and the bottom was by no means good ; and to my delight, on turning out of Sion Reach, the wind though slight was fair, so I set sail, and came up to Maynard's Yard in very fine style about two o'clock. I have already described in another place the purpose and the result of this journey.

In the spring of the year 1878 I renewed my acquaintance with the river by spending a week at my friend Mr. Schwabe's house, called Yewden, at Hambledon. Here were also Messrs. Calderon, Wells, Storey, Hodgson, and Yeames, and as we had all just got rid of our works for the Academy, our spirits were high.

Mr. Schwabe's house is a very old one, with some modern additions to it of his own. These are executed in great taste, as it is almost impossible to distinguish which of the gables are old and which new.

The house takes its name from a very remarkable old clipped yew avenue, with a sort of nave and transept in it. The garden, lawns, and flower-beds are most admirably managed. Instead of the ordinary stripes of red, yellow, grey, and beet-root colour, with which the thick-headed Scotch gardener usually decorates the flower borders of the wealthy, here, at Mr. Schwabe's own direction, patchwork and ribbon borders are unknown, and two large sloping banks are planted in glorious profusion and irregularity with every sort of hardy English flower. Pansies of every shade, masses of wallflowers, peonies, polyanthuses, poppies, campanulas, lilies, and a host of others, all growing and blowing in the greatest beauty, and filling the air with delicious perfume.

The little Hamble brook flows through the lawn in front of the house, reminding me a good deal of the one at Ewelme. It is not, however, quite as large as the Ewelme one, and has a nasty trick of running dry in some years.

I had some punting in Mr. Schwabe's punt, amusing myself by trying my skill in the eddies below the weir; and as



A Clay Cliff, Milt End.

there was a good stream on, found it most invigorating work. The river is not, however, very inviting in the early spring, especially when a backward one, as this was; the weeds and flowers having scarcely begun to show at all.

Mr. Schwabe is very fond of sailing boats, and has quite a little fleet of cutters moored off his boat-house; the reach from Hambledon to Henley is very well adapted for sailing,

and in the summer time he gets up a sailing regatta here, which is a very pretty sight, especially when the wind blows fresh.

In the summer of 1878 I entered into possession of a small cottage adjoining my mother's on the top of Remenham Hill ; it is a good way from the river, but it is healthier for the children, as it is on the top of a chalk hill, and away from the river mists. We come down here in the summer, at Christmas time, at Easter, and indeed whenever the children want fresh air.

About a week after we were settled in our new house, I went to town to bring up my punt. My first start was a failure, for I found the boat very leaky after her long rest, and I had the misfortune of carrying away my mast in Sion Reach. The wind was blowing a strong gale from the N.E., and as the tide was running down and the boat heavy and leaky, she dragged terribly, and suddenly the mast snapped off at the thwart ; it had a little shake in the wood just there. This disaster compelled me to have recourse to the pole, and in spite of the rough ground and adverse stream, I managed to get her up to the little lock at Teddington, through which she passed, and glad was I to be in clean water again. We had to bale her repeatedly, and I now contrived to tow her, although I had no mast, in a way I have seen fishermen do, by fixing the line in two places to the boat, at the head and near the stern. I reached Surbiton in this way, and there left her to have her mast mended and leak stopped, and I returned to town in considerable mortification at my failure, which I attributed to starting on a Friday. A few days afterwards I started once more under better auspices with a sound mast, no leakage, and fair weather, and accom-

plished a successful journey up to Bell Weir, just above Staines, the next day reaching Maidenhead, where my wife joined me, and we had a delightful journey up to Henley, where I found a snug berth for the boat underneath the bridge.

I frequently enjoyed punting about at Henley, and in August went a journey up to Abingdon, more especially to explore the backwater up to Sutton Courtney, which was nearly the only one on the river I had never seen. The results of this journey will be described in another chapter. At the close of the season I took my punt up to Wargrave for her winter quarters, and in 1879 I brought her down again the day before the Regatta. This year will long be remembered for its wretched weather, the Regatta itself being held whilst the river was in a flooded state. I took my boat later on down to the little horse ferry at the bottom of Aston Lane, where an old man named Levi Collins took charge of her and kept her clean. The river was flooded six several times, and often I was prevented from getting to my boat on account of the water over the road. I frequently took the punt right over the meadows below the mill in crossing to visit Mr. Schwabe, and on the Bank Holiday, which was fine, on coming down to the water to take my wife and children out for a little picnic, I found a considerable length of the path still under water, and had to get Collins to carry my children over, whilst I performed the same office for my wife. The river was not pleasant at all this whole year, as the banks were so spoilt by the floods ; flowers and water-weeds were nowhere to be found, and fishing out of the question. Late in October I took my boat down to Bray for the winter. In the following spring she was "dressed" and varnished, and I brought her up for the Regatta,

taking my wife and niece with me. We stopped a night at the "Complete Angler" for old acquaintance sake, arriving at Henley next morning. I have now concluded my personal history as far as it is connected with the river, and apologise to my readers if I have bored them in the narrative. I hope in some other chapters to write about a few things of more general interest.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM BRAY TO HENLEY.—ACCIDENT AT MAIDENHEAD.—BRAY.—JESUS HOSPITAL.—OCKWELLS MANOR HOUSE.—MR. TAMPLIN.—T. LANDSEER.—DISTRESSING ACCIDENT AT BOULTER'S WEIR.—CLIVEDEN.—HEDSOR.—COOKHAM.—WALKER'S GRAVE.—LITTLE MARLOW.—GREAT MARLOW.—BISHAM.—HURLEY.—MEDMENHAM.—MAGPIE EYOT.—CULHAM COURT.—GEORGE III. AND GUNTER'S ROLLS.—GARDENS.—GLADY'S HOLE.—HAMBLEDON LOCK.—CALEB GOULD.—GREENLANDS.—FAWLEY COURT.—HENLEY BRIDGE.



ISITORS to Maid- enhead generally make their boating excursions up the river, on account of the marvellous attractions of the beautiful reaches of Cliveden and the Quarry Woods, but if any stay at the place is made, on no account should a visit to Bray be neglected ; the river itself in this direction is not particularly interest-

ing, but the church, old almshouses, and village of Bray, and the fine old manor-house of Ockwells, about two miles inland, through Braywick, are all worth seeing. The bit of river between the railway and road bridges is familiar to all travellers on the Great Western Railway. A small eyot, formerly much

wilder and prettier, a row of eel-bucks, a pretty little boat-house by the side of the eyot, and two or three steam launches anchored off the coal wharf, form the main features of the scene, backed up by Bridge House and the "Orkney Arms," with the stone bridge between them.

Maidenhead is the very head-quarters of punts, both for pleasure and fishing. The members of the Guards' Boat-club have a number of punts moored at their lawn. I have seen some capital punting matches here, professional as well as amateur, and remember a man who lived at Taplow, with only one leg, who could punt famously. At a Maidenhead Regatta I saw a fine punt race between Mr. Woods of Raymede and two others ; Mr. Woods, who is one of the best amateur punters I ever met, won easily. It was the great admiration I had for his easy and beautiful style, that gave me my first longings to learn the art ; even when racing he never seemed to hurry in the least, his boat keeping up a steady, even way the whole time. At this same Regatta there was a match between two fishermen, Saunders and Dick Andrews, which resulted in a dead heat.

On the evening of this Regatta day at Maidenhead I remember having just sat down to supper with Mr. Storey, who was staying with me at Mrs. Copeland's, when we were alarmed by hearing shrieks and cries for help ; we ran out ; it was getting very dark, and about nine o'clock, and according to my maxims no boat ought to have been moving on the water. It appeared that some towns-people from Maidenhead were out on the water in a good-sized boat ; there were nine persons altogether, amongst whom was a little girl, a stranger to the rest of the party, who had been taken aboard from the bank, and they had

just turned to the shore for the purpose of landing her, when their boat was struck amidships by an Eton eight, which was returning home at a great rate after a long day's row with its coach. The eight made a large hole in the other boat, which rapidly filled ; some of the people in it tried to climb into the outrigger, and in the end the eighteen persons were all immersed. We heard the screams from our cottage ; the Eton boys soon swam ashore, and were hurried off to Skindles by their master, and taken safely home in a carriage ; one of them had saved two lives before he left the river bank. The night was very dark, and no one seemed to know who was missing. Six of the persons in the heavy boat were saved by different means, but the poor little girl was drowned, and a sailor who hired the boat, after saving one life, was found the next morning drowned, with a dead woman clinging round his neck. There was a curious reason given at the coroner's inquest for not allowing any recompense to the boatman who had let the boat, for the damage done, and it was that as the sailor who hired it was a well-known bad character in the town, the boatman should have known better than to let the boat to him. Now as to the sailor's character one thing is certain, his end was heroic, and proved that the reputations held by us in this world may be sometimes very far from the right ones.

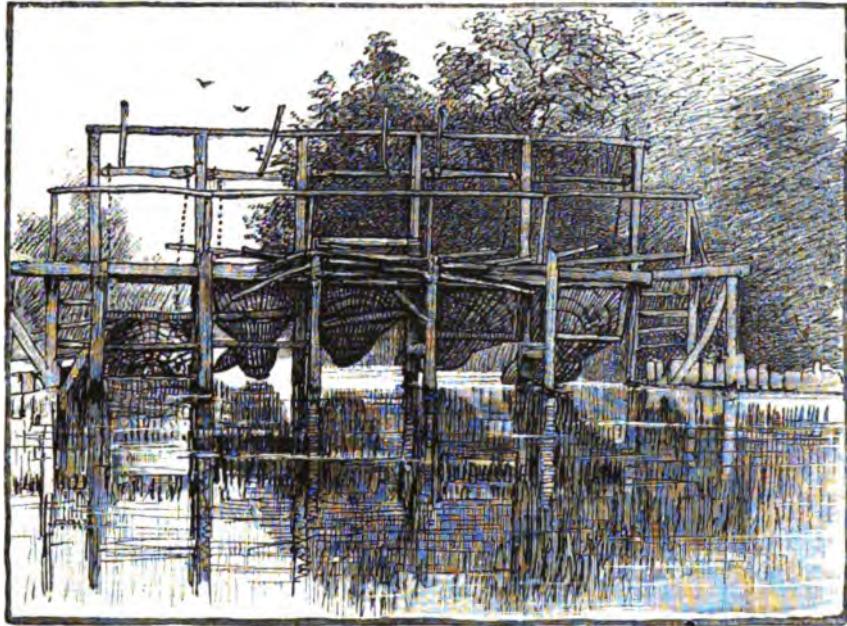
It was a sad ending to a very pleasant day, not the least painful part of it being the fact that a great many of the men on the banks who were attracted to the spot by the cries were more or less drunk, amongst whom I saw the father of the little girl, with her hat in his hand, in a maudlin state of drunken grief ; very few seemed to know what had happened, who had been drowned, or who saved ; and it was not until the next morning

that the three bodies were found, and brought up in a punt to the landing-place, amidst a drizzling rain.

Underneath the railway-bridge, if you get near one side of the long elliptical arch, there is a very remarkable echo, every sound being repeated a great many times, so that if you shout a single 'ha,' the echo replies with a weird peal of laughter, 'ha-ha-ha-ha,' &c., dying away fainter and fainter. As the fatal accident above narrated took place just above this bridge, and the bodies were found just below, the sounds beneath this arch that night must have been indeed awful.

After passing the railway-bridge there is nothing at all remarkable on the river until you near Bray ; here the river takes a bend to the left, and on the right you pass an eyot with eel-bucks on one side of it. These eel-bucks are always picturesque things, and I may as well here say a few words about them. They are placed generally in backwaters out of the course of the regular navigation, in parts where the stream runs very sharply ; a stage is raised up like a little wooden bridge, on the down-stream side of which a set of square frames like gallows is erected : up these frames the eel-baskets are raised by small wooden windlasses. When the baskets are up, there is just room for a boat to pass through the square opening underneath ; all the passages of the water above are fenced off, so that the fish are forced to go through the bucks on their way down, the back-water becoming a sort of funnel, with the baskets as strainers at the end of it. There is often a small passage at the side, through which a boat can get past the bucks, but it is made so that you have to turn a short way up stream in order to go through ; the fish, of course, do not think of this back turn, as they pass along down stream.

On account of old worn-out bucks, and the fencing and staking connected with them, all backwaters, if the water is not well known, should be passed with caution, as very dangerous snags and stumps may be met with, striking on which would be

*Eel Bucks, Bray.*

quite sufficient to knock a hole in a thin boat. In punting, as you look down so much into the water, they are generally perceived; a punt's floor is, besides, strong enough to resist a good bump.

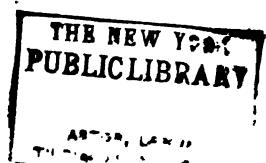
Below the bucks the Vicarage, with the church behind it, form a charming group, and at the ferry is the "George" Hotel, where my punt was built when Woodhouse lived there.

Bray is a familiar name to most people on account of the well-known old song. The church is fine, but has been much restored ; it, however, still contains some interesting old monuments. On the corbels on each side of the chancel arch are two heads, one representing the late Bishop of Oxford, and the other the late Vicar of Bray, the Rev. Austin Leigh. These heads are the work of an ordinary stonemason, and the portraits are both very good.

There are some very curious old houses round about the churchyard, one with a quaint outside staircase which runs round the corner of the house. Here the sexton used to live, and in my time an old woman always came running out, offering to show you over the church the moment you entered the churchyard. I never met any old woman—and it is a bold thing to say—whose tongue ran on as fast as hers. There is a covered passage, with a gate in it, leading through the sexton's house to a narrow street. On the walls is the date, cut deeply in old characters **1 0 8 0** standing for 1484. The most interesting thing at Bray, however, is Jesus Hospital, which was endowed by William Goddard, a free brother of the Fishmongers' Company, A.D. 1628. The front is a long building of red brick, with a narrow slip of trim garden separated from the road by a low wall ; there is a row of quaint trees clipt into enormous cigar-like shapes ; in the centre of the building is an arched entrance with the founder's effigy, two coats of arms on either side, and the inscription beneath. Passing inside you find yourself in a fine quadrangle, with a broad path up the middle leading to the ivy-grown chapel, with its picturesque weathercock. This quadrangle is rendered memorable as forming the background of Walker's



The Chaplain's Garden, Jesus Hospital, Bray.



celebrated picture, "The Harbour of Refuge." He took some liberties with the garden, making it a lawn in order to introduce the poetic figure of the mower; he also made a raised terrace round the sides of the square. In reality the centre is merely four sunk beds of flowers and kitchen plants, with a sheltered seat and pump in the middle, where Walker introduced a sculptured figure. The row of poplars behind the quadrangle he left out, as it would have cut up the light of the evening sky too much. All the rest of the scene is most truthfully rendered from nature. A clergyman usually resides here as chaplain. When Walker and I were at Bray, a Mr. Proctor filled this office; he was very polite to us, and showed us his rooms over the gateway tower. He had some fine old water-colour drawings, several De Wints and a Girtin or two. He and his wife were charming old people, and delighted at having the Almshouses drawn from.

Ockwells Manor-house is reached from Bray by a footway across some pretty water-meadows, which are very much flooded in the winter time. The path is raised in consequence, and passes over some little bridges; in the ditches about bloom quantities of water weeds, amongst which I have seen the beautiful flowering rush. The path leads to Bray Wick, and the road then goes straight on to Ockwells; it is, however, necessary to ask as you go along, for the house stands back from the road, and might be passed without notice, looking like an ordinary farmhouse at first sight. Ockwells Manor House forms one of the illustrations in Nash's book of Old Mansions, but the poor forlorn old place is very different in reality to the representation there given of it. The west side is particularly fine; it has a

high gabled entrance, with richly carved barge-board,* and by its side the old hall, with a wealth of wooden mullioned windows, the stained glass from which has been removed to decorate a modern house at Taplow ; inside, are old horse-collars and all sorts of farming things hanging up. The whole place is full of quaint corners and good old bits of carving, and is, I believe, the oldest manor-house proper, extant in England, most other old dwelling-houses partaking more of the character of the castle.

Having thus taken my reader down to Bray, I now propose to return to Maidenhead Bridge, and relate what I know about the river from there to Henley. Notoriety has rather spoiled the pleasant Orkney Arms Hotel. Everything about the hotel is as good as ever, but during the summer season it is rather overdone by pleasure parties from London, whose gaiety, show, and fashionable slang, clash unpleasantly with the gentle dignity of the river. Bridge House, opposite Skindles, looks pretty on account of its red bricks and the fine trees around, but the shore on the Berks side further up has had an hotel and some villas lately built, which utterly destroy its beauty. Much cannot be said either for the other side, where a gasworks has it all its own way. I have frequently been amused by watching the way the stream just off the end of the eyot here, baffles beginners in the art of punting. As there are plenty of punts to let at the bridge, gentlemen are often tempted to take one, just to try what it is like ; they get on famously as far as here, generally going up in a wide eddy, which runs half-way across the river on the Berks side. But just off the end of the eyot the down stream runs very sharply, and the moment

* The initial at the commencement of this Chapter represents this gabled entrance.

the nose of the punt gets a touch of this stream, the boat swings round, and the unfortunate punter commences a series of gyrations which eventually take him back to the hotel.

The backwater on the Bucks side is very pretty when once the gasworks are past, and in going up, I generally prefer this way, as the stream is not nearly so strong. There are several little ramifications in this backwater, more or less interesting, and between it and the main stream, in a connecting branch, a bathing-place has been erected. Here some old eel-bucks stood, of which I have a drawing by Field Talfourd. Off the end of the straight long eyot where the stream divides, the current is so sharp as to cause quite a hill in the water, and it is a very dangerous corner to foul. I always avoid it by going up to the lock by the backwater just described ; and by keeping well over by the paper-mill, get the benefit of the eddies, not crossing over to the lock side until above Raymede Hotel. Before Sir Roger Palmer's large house was built, there stood on the eyot opposite the hotel, a picturesque cottage inhabited by a queer old man named Lovegrove, of which I made a little sketch one fine day in November.

Close to the hotel is the pretty little house formerly occupied by the late Mr. Tamplin, the celebrated orthopædic surgeon. His death occasioned a great loss to all his friends, riverside and otherwise, and I never pass the place without calling to mind his pleasant cheery voice and handsome face. Every evening, on his return from town, he was in the habit of resting himself on the river after his labours, being rowed by his three sons in a great fat strong oak boat : they generally went to Bray and back. He had a large pug dog, named "Jumbo," given him by Sir Edwin Landseer, with whose family he was

very intimate, and this dog used to accompany the boat. Many times in the boat could be seen also the beaming face of dear old Tom Landseer, as he and Miss Landseer were frequent visitors of Tamplin. I once took Tom Landseer for a turn in my punt with Jumbo, who managed to fall overboard, and whose black muzzle and alarmed expression in the water made Landseer laugh very much.

Boulter's Lock, in the days of its former keeper, had lovely roses on standards down the garden side, of which the lock-keeper was so proud, that he would never part with a single bloom. On the occasion of a boating picnic, I once bribed the keeper's wife to give me one for a young lady, promising a sketch in exchange. I got the rose, and I gave a sketch of the lock garden and the little house. The lock-keeper lost his place shortly after this, and I believe his wife now treasures the sketch very much as a reminiscence of their former abode. The garden is not nearly so pretty now.

In the season, on a fine day, this lock is crowded with boats. I came through the lock once simultaneously with H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge. He was steering the boat he was in, and I accidentally touched his rudder with my punt's nose, which did not seem to please him.

If, instead of going through the lock, you pass round to the weir, observe the pretty mill garden, and the fine lines of the mill itself. Mr. Storey made a charming drawing of this bit. The old weir was extremely picturesque, and I painted a small picture of it with an evening effect, which is now in America, in the possession of my friend W. D. Morgan, with whom I have had many happy days on the river. Whilst engaged on this picture of an evening, I could not help admiring the fine

figures of the young Guardsmen, who usually came here for a swim, as they stood illumined in the glowing sun's rays. It was a scene worthy of Titian himself. There is nothing, perhaps, finer pictorially than the effect of a nude figure in the open air, with trees and water and sunshine. It was the marvellous charm of this effect that induced F. Walker to paint his celebrated "Bathers."

It was at this weir that I witnessed one of the most heart-breaking scenes that I have ever known. On getting one morning to the spot which I was then engaged in painting, I at once perceived from the people collected about, that something dreadful had happened. A Baptist minister had come there with his three little children to bathe; he himself was an expert swimmer, and went round to the lasher, from which he took his header. The children were left, and allowed to bathe on the mill side of the weir, where it is so very shallow that you can almost wade across to the other side. But somehow or other, probably by approaching the corner near the large fall too closely, one little boy of eight or nine years old got caught in the back suck, and was in a moment gone hopelessly. The father, even if he could have heard the cries of the others, which was impossible from the great roar of the water, was too far away to render any assistance; but as soon as he became aware of the loss, he dashed into the water in vain attempts to recover his boy. People came from the mill, and the other two children were taken into the mill-house; drags were brought, and everything that could be thought of was done. The poor father, half-dressed, kept walking round the edge of the weir, calling to his child, at times bursting into prayer, then trying to undress and jump in again, which was prevented by the

bystanders, who at length persuaded him to retire into the house. There was the greatest difficulty in recovering the body, the bucks were taken up and the water drawn off, and a boatman, one of the young Bonds, a splendid diver, went in several times; I could see his light form under the water swimming about like a fish. The great depth, and the number of piles standing about beneath the water, made it very difficult to drag, and dangerous to swim in. At length H. Fielder, the fisherman, with his drag brought the little boy to the surface, who looked quite beautiful in death, not being marred or injured in any way. He was quickly covered up and carried to Taplow on the till of Fielder's punt. The poor father was informed of the recovery of the body, and a fly having been procured, he and the remaining children went home.

Above Boulter's Lock there is a long canalized channel to the main stream, and by its side, and parallel with this, the mill-stream runs. Here are two boat-houses of picturesque construction, from one of which I painted a picture; I had models from town to sit for the figures; and the lookers-on were much troubled to know why the two young ladies kept so long in the same attitudes. One day the wind took my picture and easel clean out of the punt; I was so securely moored, that before I could get away to the rescue, the canvas had drifted down to within a very short distance of the mill-wheel. I managed to recover it however in time; I stuck it up in the sun for a good baking before I did anything more to it, and I don't think it is in any way the worse for its bath. I have seen it since, when it looked sound and unaltered.

For those who love solitude and peace on the river I recommend the mill-stream on the Bucks side, which runs a



long way behind the weir to the paper mills below ; very few people ever go along there, and kingfishers and other wild birds may be seen, sometimes, enjoying the undisturbed state of things.

The reach from the weir up to Hedsor Lock is generally allowed to be the most beautiful of any on the river ; it certainly is a very stately and noble bit of scenery. There are three eyots, which divide the river in the middle of the reach into four streams, the most charming and romantic of which is the one on the Cliveden side. Mr. Calderon made his studies for his picture of the lovers in a boat, entitled "Sighing his Soul into his Lady's Face," from the banks of the Cliveden woods ; this picture has found its way back to the river again, for it now belongs to Mr. Schwabe, and hangs in his house at Hambledon.

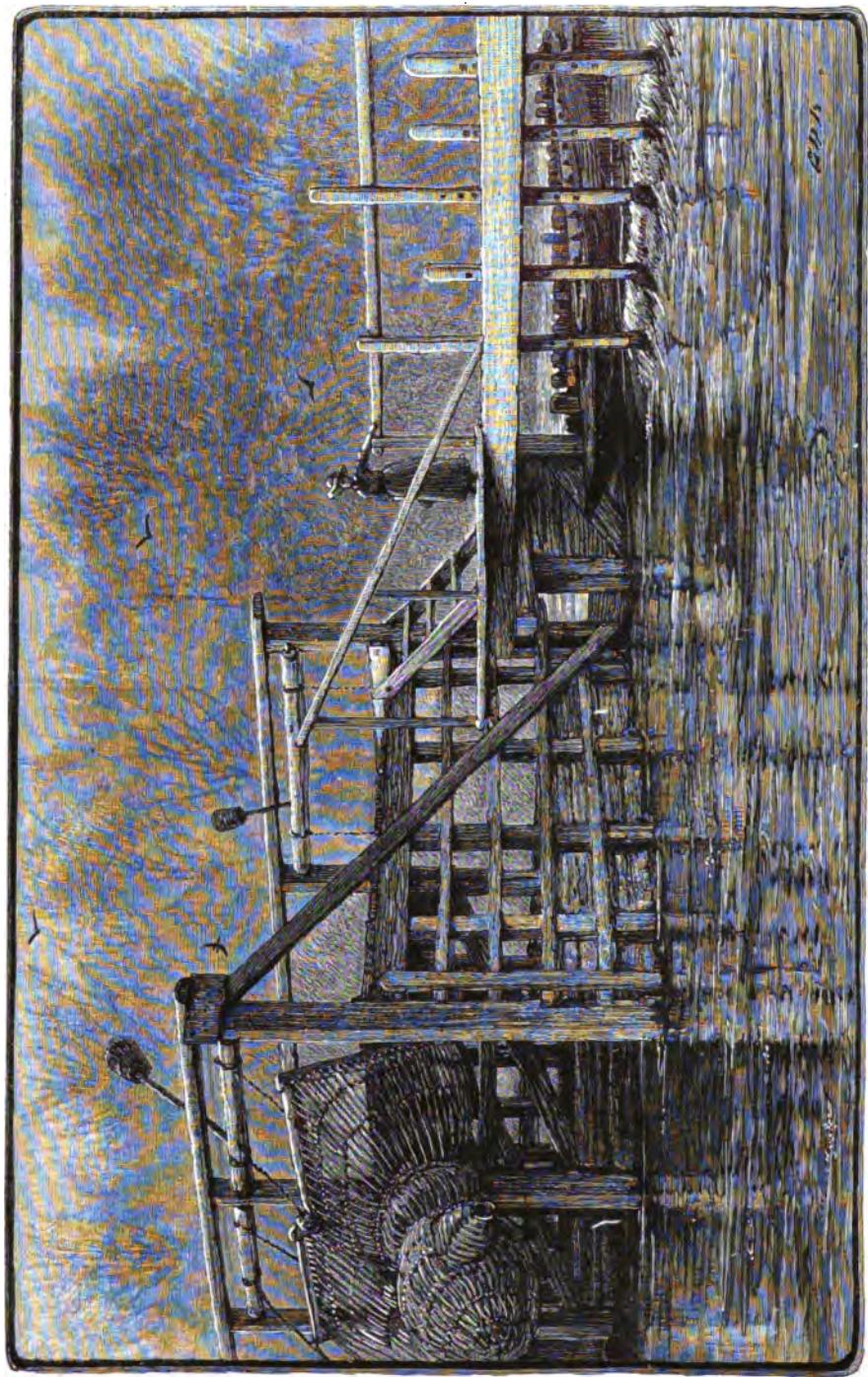
The Royal Academy Club in former times always held its summer outing at Maidenhead ; on one occasion the members went up to Cliveden, where by the kindness of the Duke of Westminster they were admitted to see the house and grounds ; these are of course very fine, and beautifully kept, but I liked most a small remnant of the old building, which we came across in the grounds (probably part of the house which was burnt down in 1795), and the beautiful walks amid the yew trees on the sides of the steep hill.

Its present possessor has much improved the view by cutting down a number of trees in a ravine which runs down to the little cottage by the spring ; this spring is always a delightful spot, and many a nice cool drink I have had from it, out of my punt scoop. Around the spring pool a quantity of laurels grow, giving quite a classic air to the spot.

At the end of the Cliveden reach there are three back-

waters, one with a very sharp stream up to the mill on the left-hand side, another of a private character behind the island of Formosa, and a very beautiful one just beside the lock which leads to Odney Weir ; this last is well worth exploring. Camping parties are generally seen on the land about the lock. I like these little camps, but I wish the picnic people would take the trouble to clear up and burn the bits of paper and straw bottle-covers, which are so frequently seen vulgarizing the prettiest parts of the river banks. Lord Boston's eel-bucks in the main stream at Hedsor prevent boats passing up the water to the right, though I believe there is a perfect right of way, so long as no landing is attempted. Formerly the barges went round this way, and when the lock was made, the then Lord Boston brought an action against the Thames Conservancy for loss of tolls, which were claimed at Hedsor. An ineffectual attempt was once made to turn me away, whilst sketching in my punt just below the bucks. It is quite absurd to pretend that the water here is in any sense private. There are numerous attempts made all up the river to shut up back-waters that run through private property ; sometimes bars are put across, and worst of all, wires, which are extremely dangerous in the dark ; if any fatal accident should occur, I believe the proprietors of the wire would be morally guilty of manslaughter. The selfishness of those who have the use and pleasure of all other parts of the river in thus endeavouring to prevent one or two boats from occasionally coming past their property, seems to me very inexcusable.

The three river courses and the lock canal all join again at Cookham, and pass united through the bridge. The stream down to the mill on the Cookham side is worth going down ; it



Lord Boston's Eel Baskets, Hedder.

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is very picturesque when it comes to an open common, with geese generally on it, and the distant magnificent range of the Cliveden Woods forming a fine background.

Cookham, with the exception of the bridge, has altered very little, and the village street which Walker painted with the geese coming down, and the inhabitants popping their heads out on either side, is just the same. The village inn, with the quaint sign of "Bel and the Dragon," is up this street, very near the little cottage occupied by Walker's mother; the small inn by the river is generally in great request, being first-rate in every respect. I was lucky enough to get the little front bed-room there, one October evening, the view from which in the morning was most lovely; the mist curling up from the water, and the autumn sun lighting up the Cliveden beeches radiant in golden glory.

Poor Walker's grave is a very humble one; it is on the right of the path leading up to the church door. On a recent visit to it I met a curious old countryman lingering near the grave, who seemed to know quite well who Walker was, though he had never seen him. It appeared that the man was a sort of amateur artist himself, and he showed me a number of views of the neighbourhood that he had drawn in a sketch book; the interest he took in Walker was entirely that of a brother brush.

Above the bridge the river is not very pretty, nor is it good for punting, though fair ground for this will be found on the Bucks side as far as the railway bridge. The mill chimney ruins the whole reach in an artistic point of view, but curiously enough the railway bridge, being of wood, is not nearly so ugly as the iron road-bridge at Cookham. At Spade Oak there is generally a nice smell of pitch and tar from the barge-builders' yard; and

just above, on the other side, the high ground of the Quarry Woods commences to approach the river. These woods, with the islands in front of them, form a magnificent piece of scenery, almost as fine as Cliveden ; indeed, from its wildness, I am inclined to prefer it. The eyots and backwaters are very beautiful, but I am sorry to say, that since I first knew these woods, a house has been built in their very heart, and the steam-launches moored in front considerably mar the otherwise perfect wildness of the place.

Little Marlow is a charming rustic village, with a very pretty church ; it lies a short distance back from the river, opposite the Quarry Woods. A small brook runs through it, and the water-cress beds are very picturesque with their islands, foot-bridges, and summer-houses. The water is from a spring which is slightly warm, in consequence of which the cress beds are very valuable, as in winter they never freeze. I have a particular fondness for watercresses, as apart from the association they have in my mind with running water, they are said to possess an antidotal property to the injurious effects of tobacco smoke, and they certainly do seem to give a wonderfully renewed appetite for another pipe.

Marlow Race, as it is called, is a tough piece of stream, and is far nicer to come down than to go up ; the view looking down from the lock of the abrupt turn as the woods are reached is excessively fine, especially in the autumn, and a walk along the tow-path on a moonlight night most enjoyable ; the mysterious voices, the lights, and the smell of the wood fires which come from the little camping parties across the river, adding much to the interest of the scene. The small backwater in which I bathed my children, and the larger one up to the weir, are both

very shallow, an advantage which the cows seem to appreciate. The banks abound with forget-me-nots ; you can pass up to the "Complete Angler" Hotel by the larger backwater, and land at some steps there just below the weir ; this is sometimes convenient in case you do not wish to pass the lock. Marlow Lock and mill are very good old-fashioned specimens of their kind. The lock is a dangerous one to pass, being an old one, with many ragged piles and broken woodwork about its sides. It was our favourite place of an evening, when my wife and I were at Marlow, from which to see the sunset and the moon rise, and there we saw an eclipse of the latter, as it rose behind the Quarry Woods in great splendour. Locks are generally good places to idle at ; the great lever handles are very convenient to lounge on, the keepers have mostly something interesting to tell you, while the excitement of passing boats never fails in its variety. But one caution I should most earnestly impress on lock loungers—never take children with you, or the anxiety about them will utterly destroy the pleasure of the place ; ours were always snug in their beds when we paid our visits to the lock.

The weir is passed just as you emerge from the lock. It is not so dangerous as it looks, as in the summer time there is seldom any depth of water going over. On the occasion of a flood here in the winter a few years ago, a small steam launch belonging to Mr. Louch, of Quarry Wood House, was driven over the weir as a feat of daring. It stuck a little on the edge, but finally slipped over and got down safely amidst the cheers from the crowd on the bridge. I have seen a gentleman shoot the weir at Moulsey in an india-rubber boat several times, but it is a dangerous thing to do, as there are plenty of iron bolt-heads and jagged pieces of wood, any of which, if they happened

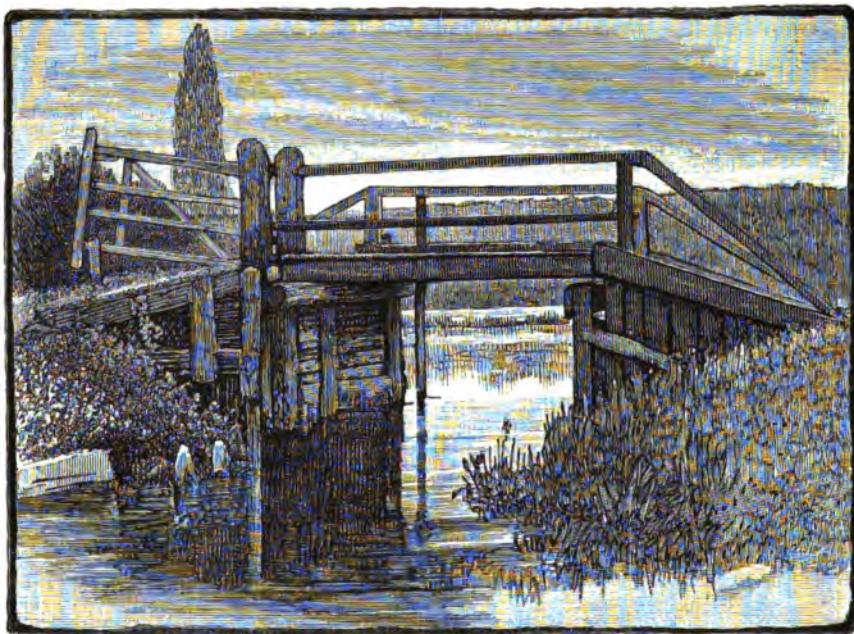
to catch the boat, would either upset or tear a hole in it. Talking of india-rubber boats, my nephew told me of a practical joke which he saw played at Eton, by the boys, on a stout boatman, who was induced to get into one of these portable boats, and pushed off from the rafts with the screw undone from the air-hole ; the boat in a very few minutes gradually collapsed, and folded up round the poor man as it went down beneath him.

The old bridge at Marlow, which I am sorry to say was pulled down before my time, went across the river from the upper corner of the weir close by the "Angler" coffee-room, and joined the old street opposite, before alluded to as immortalised by Walker. I have seen an old engraving of it, in which the weir is represented just in front ; the wooden bridge, the spire of the old church, and some large barn-like roofs, altogether forming as picturesque and interesting an arrangement as the present is ugly and vulgar. A low brick wall at the end of the hotel gardens overlooking the weir, may have been there when the old bridge existed ; this wall, after lunch, is a fascinating place on which to lean and smoke, and regard the various things around. The view below of the distant hills, the refreshing sound of the plashing weir, the fishermen's punts moored about, and generally a fisherman or two to talk to, are the attractions of the place, always taking care to keep your back to the church and suspension bridge. I saw here on one of these idling occasions, a large number of young trout put into the water below the weir.

When rested and ready to start again, if punting, I advise you to keep the Berkshire side, which though at first very muddy, soon gets better, and the water is so deep about the

bridge, that crossing over is not easily done. When Bisham Church is reached you can cross over, the punting then being very fair all the way up to Temple Lock on the tow-path side.

The little church at Bisham has not escaped the restorer's hands ; its situation is however its great charm, and cannot fail



Tow-path Bridge near Marlow.

to attract the gaze of the passer by. Inside the church, the old tomb of the Hobbies is interesting, and the exquisite colouring of the window, with its wonderful coats of arms in it, may serve to help an artistic mind through the tedium of a dull sermon. I never pass Bisham Church without seeing one or perhaps two artists at work from it, seated on the tow-path opposite. There must have been a great number of drawings

made of this prettily composed little group, but I never recollect seeing any at the various Exhibitions. The Abbey itself is never quite so popular with the artists as the church and trees ; why, I do not know, for the colouring of the old house is superb, and there is a forsaken romantic look about the whole place which disposes one strongly to believe in the ghost story of the Lady Hobby, who, dressed in black and white, is said to haunt the building by way of expiation for having beaten to death the little child who blotted her writing-books.

Temple Mills, for working copper, originally belonged to the Knights Templars, who owned some mills on the River Lea, also called Temple Mills; recently these mills have been worked again, but not for copper. When I first knew them, they were to be let or sold, and the place had a most abandoned aspect. I do not think I ever saw such a curious mixture of weeds and machinery. As you walked about amidst the ruins it seemed like some place remembered more in a dream than in reality, and gave one hopes that if the ruin of our manufactories ever takes place, the remains will not be altogether devoid of picturesqueness. Nature does not take so very long in touching up with beauty anything that is only left alone ; rust, weeds, moss, and weather, are powerful in adorning even the most uncompromising materials. Some old buildings and stables, belonging to these mills, situated just above the weir, formed the background of one of my Academy pictures.

From Temple Lock to Hurley is but a very short distance. Temple House, on the left-hand side, beyond its many windows and copper roof has not much interest. On the Bucks side, Harleyford House (query Hurleyford ?) itself is ugly enough, though no house on the river has a sweeter situation ; here are

cannon balls and fortifications (against whom intended I do not know), neatly kept landing-places, the usual trespassers' boards, and some lovely backwaters, in one of which is a very fine boat-house, with the stream running through it, near which a beautiful plane tree overhangs the water, beneath which tree the late Emperor of the French was very fond of lying in his boat, when on a visit here in bygone days. All the backwaters about Harleyford are very pretty, and in one of them Mr. Fildes painted his boat picture, "Fair, quiet, sweet rest." There are generally a good many artists at Hurley, and two or three house boats can usually be seen moored off the lock-house. Lady Place and Hurley Mill, with its fine old weathercock, afford a great variety of subjects for the artist. Some curious old fish-ponds inside the grounds of Lady Place, the well-known wall with its old ivy on it, the dovecot, barns and gateways, all testify to the grandeur and beauty of the house that has perished. Not the least picturesque features about here are the little wooden bridges, where the tow-path changes sides; long may they exist, as it is ten to one if they are ever repaired it will be with iron. The boat-house just above, which belongs to Sir Gilbert East, is not an ugly one, and in time it will look very much better, as it is chiefly the varnish which spoils it now.* I never can see the beauty of varnished wood. By the process of varnishing all the bloom is taken away; good oak would last quite as long without it, the parts underground and by the water could be pickled or pitched, but the upper works might far better be left to Nature, who knows very well what colour is best in these matters, as witness old oak palings; in any case, if

* Since the above was written, the varnish has almost all disappeared from the effects of the weather of 1879.

preservation is the object, a good soaking with linseed oil would effect the purpose far better, and without giving the treacly-coloured, sticky look of varnish. I believe half the eyesore of modern church restoration is due to the love of varnishing, stained and varnished deal being made to do duty for good old oak. I here feel somewhat guilty about the varnished sides of my punt, but I think in the case of boats, varnish serves a useful purpose, as it enables one to judge of the age of the boat, the look of the wood not being concealed. Painted boats should always be distrusted, the wood very often being quite rotten underneath ; the outworks of a boat cannot be left without some protection from the water, and varnish seems to be the best thing at present invented that answers the purpose.

The punting ground above the lock to Medmenham is very bad, especially in the first part of the Reach, where it is soft and muddy, and even when you get up to the queer bends and eyots, though the ground hardens up as the stream sharpens, there are so many odd corner stumps and deep holes about, that if the wind is against you, it is not at all an easy thing to get along nicely. I believe on the whole, for a punt, the best way through this little Thames Archipelago is to avoid taking the short cut, and to pass leisurely along by the barge-stream on the Berks shore ; the ground here is all good. By keeping as near to the shore as the shallows will allow in approaching Medmenham, and not crossing over to the Abbey too soon, you may avoid the stream almost entirely.

As to Medmenham Abbey, it can be landed at and seen in a very few minutes, and Murray's "Handbook for Berks, Bucks, and Oxfordshire" gives every information that is required. The new Hotel is a great accommodation as a

half-way house between Marlow and Henley, and if you go ashore, by all means pay a visit up the village to the church and the little duck-pond; there is too a very curious old forsaken house up the hill, said to have been visited by Charles II. and Nell Gwynne.

From Medmenham the river is rather dull until you reach Magpie Eyot; the stream is not very strong, and punting can be done with ease all the way up on the tow-path side. I have frequently seen herons along this Reach, standing with their grey heads out of the long weeds, for all the world like old gampy umbrellas stuck in the ground. The gracefully curved heron which the landscape painters are so fond of introducing in the corners of their pictures, as far as my knowledge of these birds is concerned, is quite a conventional fiction. Magpie Eyot is just about the size of Robinson Crusoe's Island, at least so my little girl tells me, though as I never was at the latter place I cannot say for certain; it is not at any rate all one eyot, but as usual is divided by little streams into two or three. The backwater through the eel-bucks is extremely pretty; a boat-house belonging to Culham Court is here, with a pretty little cottage and garden attached.

Culham Court is a queer old, red-brick, Queen Anne house, uncomfortably perched up on a chalk hill. I find I get to like this house better the oftener I see it, and indeed now almost admire it. It belonged in years gone by to the Cornwallis West family, one of whom, the Hon. R. West, here entertained His Majesty King George III. for a night and a day. At breakfast the host, knowing the partiality which His Majesty had for a particular breakfast roll, made only by Gunter's in Berkeley Square, had these fetched from that shop and brought

down by relays of horsemen all the way from town in time for the Royal breakfast, the rolls being kept hot by being wrapt up in flannel. His Majesty only remarked on tasting them, "Ah! Gunter, Gunter. I am glad you deal with Gunter, West; nobody like Gunter." When he entered the house His Majesty wiped his shoes most carefully, and on Mr. West's begging him not to take that trouble, he replied, "No, no, West, I am not going to carry dirt into any man's house."

When I first saw Culham there was hardly any garden at all on the river front, as the park-like grounds ran right up to the house itself, which made it look more quaint and uncomfortable than even now. Rather elaborate attempts have been made lately to pull up something round about its front, to hide, as it were, its nakedness, but it is not the place for a garden, and nothing can ever look comfortable on so steep a hill. The first duty of a garden is, in my opinion, that it shall be convenient and easy to walk in, in perfect contrast to the mountains, hills, and forests of wild places; it cannot be too trim, tidy or cozy. The old fashion of clipping hedges proceeded from a true sense of the fitness of things. All ponds, paths, and fountains in a garden should show by their aspect that they are distinctly under the control of man; the grass cannot be too velvety, nor the paths too smooth, but a sloping hill at once baffles a true gardener, and even when terraces are introduced, the evil is not altogether overcome. A small terrace here and there is pretty, as is also a sunk walk, but I think no one really enjoys walking up and down great terraces like those at the Crystal Palace; hills are well enough in a park, but choose a level bit for the garden by all means.

By here advocating extreme trimness and formality in

gardens, I may seem by some to be contradicting what I said in a former Chapter, of my hatred to ribbon-borders and patchwork floral decorations in garden beds ; but what I think is in perfect good taste in the matter of lawns, paths, hedges, fountains, and the general architectural arrangements of the garden, by no means holds good with the flowers themselves. These ought to be treated more as the inhabitants of the place, planted here and there wherever they can grow comfortably, and shining out as spangling beauty-spots, their ease and graceful growth being much set off by the formality of the background. All the better sort of old-fashioned flowers like roses, honeysuckles, lilies, hollyhocks, sunflowers, wallflowers, and sweet peas, seem by Nature to refuse to be made into patchwork ; a row of hollyhocks looks well enough, or a row of rose trees, but there is never any massing of all one colour into a blazing uniformity ; lavender and sweetbriar too are not half enough thought of now-a-days. One other suggestion and I have done with these gardening remarks : a garden can very easily be too large, and in the large houses and gardens of the wealthy, this is often to me a drawback, unless the ground is cunningly divided into different and distinct sorts of pleasure gardens, as Lord Bacon directs in his well-known *Essay*. The gardens at Hampton Court are thus skilfully divided, the main flower-garden having the chief space ; then there are avenues of limes, and little canals of a totally different character, a walled-off wilderness with the maze on one side, and another pretty sunk garden with a sundial and avenue, walled off on the other, the limit of the gardens being very judiciously fixed by the railings of the Home Park ; and as the river runs along one side, there is made a charming long walk

all the way to Ditton, quite distinct from all the other parts, the wall built low, so as to command the view of the water. In some noblemen's gardens the individuality of these different pieces of ground is preserved by their being named after some lady or gentleman who one day may have liked them, as "Aunt Louisa's Walk" at Fryston Hall, "Queen Mary's Bower" at Hampton, "Addison's Walk" at Holland House, &c. If I had a very large garden to deal with, and also luckily two or three daughters, I would certainly give my daughters each a separate piece, for them to direct, and to be named after them.

One of the deep holes in the river near Culham, is named "Gleddie's" or "Glady's Hole." The legend as told me by the fishermen, being that here a very bad man of the name of Gleddie was drowned, and that as he sank, the bubbles that rose from him exploded in loud curses as they reached the surface.

At the horse-ferry, where the tow-path changes side, a little grassy lane leads down to the river from Aston and Remenham Hill. This used to be called "The Lady Moor," why, I do not know; it had a pretty avenue of very fine ash trees all along it. A few ash trees are still there, but nothing to what they were in former days. Above the horse-ferry the stream is very sharp indeed, and some backwaters on the other side lead to the mill and weir at Hambledon. The wood from the timber-yard on the Bucks shore is used, I believe, chiefly for the construction of the wheels of the omnibuses belonging to the London General Omnibus Company. In shore here is the pretty cottage inhabited by a Mr. Hobbs and his son. His is the oldest resident family in the neighbourhood, for the Hobbses have here been tenants of Balliol College (to which the ground belongs) for over two hundred years. Mr. Hobbs's

daughter is English nurse in the family of the Crown Princess of Prussia. The gables of Yewden rise up over the trees behind Hambledon Mill, and the little Hamble brook here joins the river.

Hambledon Lock has lately been repaired, and not before it wanted it, as the old lock leaked so much that it took a very long time to fill. Locks are not very old institutions on the river, and old people by the river still speak of them as pound locks, as distinct from the old sluices up which the barges were formerly drawn by means of windlasses. At Hambledon, behind the lock-house, are the remains of the old winch formerly used here; I was told that the lord of the manor regularly applies for the "hire of the winch" from the lock-keeper, to keep alive an old claim on the Thames Conservancy, though the money is never paid.

Miss Stapleton, of Remenham Hill, to whom I am indebted for many interesting stories about this part of the river, told me of an old man who was once lock-keeper at Hambledon, named Caleb Gould. He came to the lock in 1777, over a hundred years ago; he lived to be 92, and is buried in Remenham Churchyard, the following lines by Gay being on his tombstone:—

This world's a jest,
And all things show it ;
I thought so once,
And now I know it.

His wife's tomb is beside his. When he came to Hambledon the barges were pulled up by the winch. Caleb, and his son Joseph who succeeded him, had a large oven at the back of the lock-house, and sold bread to the bargemen and others.

When Miss Stapleton knew them, the son worked the new pound lock, while the old man used to sit and sun himself underneath a large lavender bush, descendants of which still grow in the lock garden. Caleb wore a long coat with lots of buttons, and ate for his supper every night a dish of onion porridge. He was hale and hearty to the very last, every day taking a walk up Hambledon, making a great cross in the ground to mark where he had been—which crosses were known as Caleb's crosses. Joseph Gould in after life emigrated with his family to New Zealand, where they have thrived well. On the bricks by the side of the lock cottage door, are the initials C. \ddagger G., 1777, and below, J. G., 1826. The oven at the back of the house has lately been pulled down.

Behind Hambledon Lock, in the waters leading to the mill, Mr. Schwabe's boat-house, and little fleet of sailing-cutters may be seen ; the boatman's cottage adjoining was formerly a small inn, and many a draught of shandy-gaff I have had beneath the little arbour ; when this place was shut up some years ago there was great indignation amongst the local population, and the poisoning of a vast quantity of pheasants in the preserves belonging to Greenlands, was supposed by many to have been an act of revenge by some aggrieved parties.

The punting is not good about here until Temple Island is reached ; the tow-path side, of course, is the shortest course to take, but the ground is much better on the other side up as far as Greenlands. This place is the well-known residence of the Rt. Hon. W. H. Smith, and has been by him considerably enlarged ; it is, I believe, a comfortable house, but the contrast of the dark cedar trees around gives it rather a sombre effect. There are some fine inland ponds near, where skating in the

winter is very good ; these ponds and the ditches and flat meadows about are favourite haunts of the heron and lapwing. The river takes a bend here nearly due south, and from the island to Phillis Court it is pretty nearly straight, so that Henley Church is plainly seen at the end of the reach ; this reach is so well known as the Regatta race-course that any description of it would be superfluous here. Remenham Vicarage is passed on the left, where the late Vicar, Mr. Skottowe, shot himself in the spring of 1877 ; being much beloved by his parishioners, and by all who knew him, his loss was greatly felt. Some farm buildings, and a pretty farm-house with its green common ground beneath some fine trees, are next passed, and Fawley Court on the other side soon reached. I have frequently heard Fawley Court set down as devoid of architectural beauty, but do not think deservedly at all ; it is plain and simple, and, like all Wren's work, beautifully proportioned, its roof of pale green slates in agreeable contrast to the house, which, as long as I remember it, has been slightly tinted with pink ; it is a wonderfully well-built house, very comfortable, deserving well to long remain in its present unaltered state. It was a Miss Freeman of Fawley Court who sat as model for the head of the Isis, executed by her friend Miss Damer, for one of the keystones of Henley Bridge. Walpole wrote in raptures about this new bridge, the designs for which, according to him, were General Conway's own,* and the daughter's work on it as fine

* The design for the bridge was really made by Mr. W. Hayward, of Shrewsbury, who died before the work was begun. Walpole, as usual, can imagine no one but an aristocrat capable of anything good in art, and ignores the real artist. The cost of the bridge was £10,000. It was finished in 1786. About four years ago the toll was finally abolished.

as anything in the antique ; the bridge was finer, he said, than any bridge in the world except a bridge at Florence, but the one at Henley beat that in its beautiful situation.

Phillis Court, Poplar Point, the timber yard, and "Red Lion" are quite familiar with those who have ever witnessed a regatta, and as I propose to mention something about the antiquities of Henley further on, I will here conclude this rather lengthy Chapter.

CHAPTER V.

FROM HENLEY TO SONNING.—THE RAILWAY.—BANK FISHERMEN.—MARSH LOCK ON THE MORNING OF THE REGATTA.—BOLNEY REACH.—BACKWATER TO WARGRAVE.—BOYS AND GUNS.—WARGRAVE.—CANOE ACCIDENT.—SHIPLAKE.—ST. PATRICK'S STREAM.—AWKWARD BITS.—SONNING.—THE INNS.—A WEDDING.—MR. SADLER OF SONNING LOCK.—HIS BEES, ROSES, AND POEMS.



HENLEY Station, on account of its proximity to the side of the river, is the most convenient of any on the Great Western Railway for boating visitors ; you can step out of the train almost into your boat, without having to traverse any length of gritty road. At Regatta time this is a great advantage, as hampers and luggage can easily be carried direct to the boats in waiting ; the porters and officials on this line are very obliging and civil, and the rolling stock has lately been renewed.

The well-known Henley slip-train, a great comfort to city men, is generally well patronised. The views from the carriage windows at Shiplake, and as you near Henley, are extremely

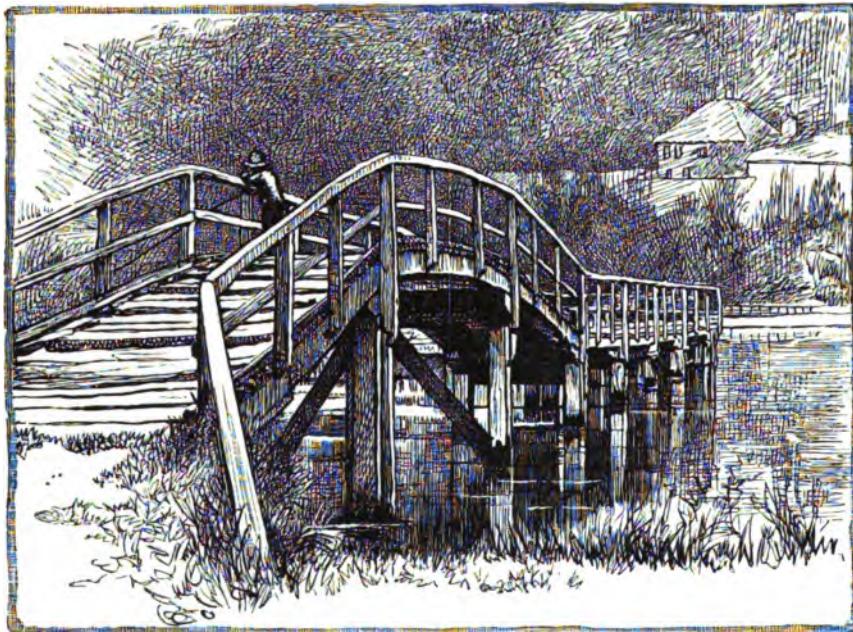
appetising to a river lover ; many very beautiful peeps of the river are seen from the right side as you come along. Shiplake Station is useful, in case you live at Wargrave, as by passing down the little green lane on the right, the river is soon reached, where a boat can meet you, the pretty row home being most enjoyable after the bustle of the train.

I shall now resume our journey up the river, always supposing it to be performed in a punt. After passing Thamesfield, the comfortable residence of R. A. Cosier, Esq., Solomon's Hatch is reached on the Berks shore, where there is a good bathing-place. I never could find out who the particular Solomon was that the place is named after, and I know of no hatches or little sluices about here, but the bathing-place is a capital institution for Henley ; the water is clear and the bottom sandy. Between the hours of 11 and 1 in the morning it is reserved for ladies only, and I am glad to say a good many avail themselves of this opportunity of learning the art of swimming ; the bathing-place is in a backwater, separated from the main stream by a long eyot, and I believe during the ladies' hours quite safe from intrusion. The stream here is sharp, as is always the case just below a weir, and the punting very good, the water nowhere being of any great depth ; just at Henley Bridge, as there are some very deep holes, the punting is awkward without an intimate knowledge of the bottom, but from the railway station up to the lock this is everywhere of a convenient depth. In punting up, it is best to pass up to the left of the eyot, in front of the bathing-place, if not during the ladies' bathing hour, as the distance is considerably shorter this way, and the punting easier ; you also avoid annoying any bank fishermen who may be along the tow-path. These men are mostly Londoners, who come

down on Saturdays and Sundays in great numbers during the fishing season, with small square boxes or baskets, on which they sit ; they are very liable to become abusive when disturbed, as they generally have heavy bets on the weight of fish they catch. They are often as great a nuisance to the punter as he is to them, as in case the side they are on is the best one for punting, on account of wind or stream, it is very hard to be expected to turn out into the deep water ; they fail to perceive this difficulty, and are generally lavish with slang abuse, which if you have ladies with you is by no means pleasant. I never take the banks where these men are seated if I can avoid it, but occasionally there is no help for it ; the tow-path from Henley to Sonning is a favourite resort of these anglers, and on Sunday evening the platform at Twyford Junction is quite crowded with them on their return to town.

At Marsh Lock there are two Mills, one on each side, and the opposing currents from these Mills render the approach to the lock from below always rather difficult. The tow-path passes along to the lock, over the weir and mill waters, by a long, wooden bridge, most picturesque in its line and character, and which I am grieved to say is all doomed to be removed, as the whole weir is now being reconstructed. I think it is quite possible the construction of this bridge and the arrangement of the weir and lock were carried out under the direction of a brother of Gainsborough the artist ; but about this I shall speak in a future Chapter. In winter time, when there is a flood, the long line of this bridge and the weir, as seen from the high ground on the Wargrave Road, is very singular and striking, especially when the meadows and tow-path are under water.

A disagreeable smoky chimney spoils the look of the Mill on the Oxfordshire side, but the other, though lately rebuilt, is by no means ugly ; some little outbuildings in red brick above the weir are not out of harmony with their surroundings, and



Old Horse Bridge, Marsh Lock.

the long walls in the Mill garden are suggestive of peaches, nectarines, and all manner of wall fruit, which the situation and aspect favour in the highest degree.

Marsh Lock is a terrible one to pass through on a Regatta morning. I shall never forget coming through from Wargrave on one of these occasions. The gates could hardly open on account of the jam of boats against them, everybody as usual wanting to get in first, the ladies being by far the most

eager and energetic in their endeavours. The whole mass of boats shaped itself into the form of a huge arrow-head, and right down into the middle of the pack came slowly but surely a large tug-barge, called the "Spitfire" (since blown-up and wrecked at Sonning), with a crowd of Reading folks on board at a shilling a head. As the gates at last opened, the wedge tightened up, and I was glad to remember that my punt's sides were inch stuff, and the oak treads very strong, for I felt and heard the sides of other boats giving way like baskets, with many an ominous creak; outriggers and rowlocks got jammed and broken, and amidst cries and vituperation of every sort, the lock gradually filled. I had no idea how many boats a lock would really hold till then. The excitement reached its pitch when the gun at Henley was heard announcing the start for the first race, and the instant the lower gates could be opened the whole crowd of boats rushed out, splash, dash, and away, like school boys out of school.

The return from the Regatta is never so bad, as people leave the course at various hours, and no one is in any very great hurry, but the poor lock-keeper has a very hard day's work.

Once above Marsh Lock the whole character of the river is changed, a steep hill and cliffs is on the left hand, open meadows and poplars on the right, and a great, calm, wide reach of deep water and sluggish stream, partaking of the character of a small lake; the punting is very bad; the tow-path side is fringed all along with soft green sedges and persicaria, the sure indicators of mud. The wooded side, though the bottom is hard, is very deep, and the projecting willows make it rather awkward, so if the wind were fair, I should have no hesitation in setting sail. The grounds of Park Place come down

to the river's edge, just above the Mill garden, passing underneath the roadway by a picturesque arch, through which a glimpse of what is known as the Happy Valley is obtained. The well-known boat-house with its little saint, though rather artificial, is very pretty, and the whole bit would be quite charming if it were not for an ugly trespassers' board.

There are several reaches of the river in which chalk cliffs rise on the banks, as those at Park Place do ; at Harleyford, Quarry Woods, Hartswood, Pangbourne, Shiplake, and in parts of Cliveden. The chalk cliffs give great variety to the beauty of the scenery, but at none of these spots is their arrangement so perfect as at Park Place ; here there is a sort of undercliff between the base of the chalk and the river, which is covered with delicious foliage, a number of most graceful ash trees supplying the greatest amount of the beauty. These trees are rather delicate in our climate ; they likewise require a good supply of moisture, and here in the snug shelter of the chalk cliffs, with the rich soil beneath them, and the water never failing their roots, they grow in their utmost luxuriance. From the Wargrave Road above the cliff I love to look over and down on to the tops of these trees, and realise the beautiful way that foliage must appear to birds. The ash was Constable's favourite tree ; the exquisite grace of its branches, the sad poetic tone of its foliage, and the pale olive grey of its bark, rendering it very dear to him.

The Wargrave Road, which runs through the woods and over the arch, is the one traversed by Mr. Black's phaeton on its tour, and a prettier, shadier drive does not exist anywhere. The grounds of Park Place have been divided into two parts since Walpole's time, and on the second half a house called

Templecombe has been erected. In the grounds of Park Place is a Druid's Temple, the stones of which were brought from Jersey and presented to General Conway.

The end of this reach of the river is very lovely, the main-stream, with some backwaters and islands, trending away to the right by Bolney Court ; whilst, on the left, the stream narrows up to the entrance of a very interesting backwater of about a mile and a quarter's length, reaching quite up to Wargrave. At this end, where it leaves the main river, on the right-hand side, in the sluggish water and mud-bank, grow lofty plumes of reeds and reed-mace, seven or eight feet high, of quite a tropical character, through which one would not be surprised to see the mother of Moses or Pharaoh's daughter appear. It is generally sheltered and calm here, and to see this place in its perfection, a fine evening at the end of September should be chosen, when the colouring of the weeds and banks in the warm sunlight is as fine as anything ever done by Turner and Nature combined.

You need not mind the notice-boards about private waters, &c., if you wish to explore this stream. These boards are generally put up at backwaters ; but as long as the stream is navigable and no landing is attempted, the right of way cannot be disputed. The little stream narrows as it passes an orchard on the left, and then, with a bend, a private boat-house and bathing-place are reached ; about this part, if in a rowing-boat, look out carefully for some sunk fencing beneath the water, which cannot be seen when you are sitting down, and against which you may come with a nasty jerk if going fast. When punting, you are almost sure to see the obstruction, and also the passway through it, quite clearly.

Immediately beyond this place, the stream runs beneath a pretty bridge, and then comes out into the meadows of Wargrave Marsh ; here it winds about with many a twist, at one place having a small island in its centre. Weeds of every sort grow in great beauty, and many shy birds frequent the spot ; the kingfisher may often be seen darting along, and here I once saw some long-tailed tomtits, which had a nest up in a willow stump. A heron is very likely to be disturbed by your boat, and go off with its great flapping wings. Here I wish to make a protest against the abominable nuisance of boys and guns on the river, as in this very reach I once came on some of these pests. Shooting from boats on a river like the Thames in the summer-time is a most dangerous and foolish practice, and ought not to be allowed. The usual method of conducting this sport, is for a couple of hulking country boys, with a rusty old gun, to get a smaller boy to row them in some rotten old boat, whilst a mongrel water-dog goes floundering along amongst the rushes on the banks ; the boys shoot at anything living that flies or creeps out, rats and moorhens being the great prizes. The danger to river travellers is great, as well as the annoyance, as in case you are passing on the other side of an eyot where this sport is going on, it will frequently happen that the shots come peppering over your head. Great numbers of our more rare birds are gradually becoming extinct, chiefly owing to these stupid boys. The difficulty is how to get at them ; I have no doubt they have neither paid gun nor dog licence, and I would suggest that the Conservators of the river should prohibit the letting of boats to anyone with a gun who could not produce a licence.

To return to our backwater, which goes wandering on, very

much in the style of my writing, until you begin to think it will never come to an end, save that as the water is running you know it must come from somewhere; at length a very low bridge is reached, to pass under which it will be necessary to lie down in your boat, and then the stream widens, and on the right-hand side there runs an outlet into the main. It is best, however, to continue straight on, past a funny little cottage on the left, which when I first knew it seemed inhabited only by cats: three beautiful white ones were generally to be seen basking in the sun. The landing-place of Mrs. Wyatt's hotel is just above the cat cottage, and you cannot do better than stop and have lunch at the "George and Dragon."

Hill House, formerly the residence of my friend Miss Jekyll, is up on the hill above the hotel. Wargrave is a sweet quiet little village, and the houses, with their lawns on the river bank, all add to the charm of the spot, the elm-trees in Mr. F. Maitland's garden being, with those about the church, quite the feature of this bend of the river.

A distressing accident occurred here in the winter of '78. A Captain Markham and his sister came down from Shiplake to skate on the backwater by Wargrave Church. There is an old free ferry here, the boat for which was an old one, and half full of frozen water. The lady and gentleman and a little girl got into this wretched craft, not without a good deal of remonstrance with the ferryman, and about halfway across the boat sank. The young lady was rescued, I believe, by a gentleman who was skating on the backwater, and Captain Markham and the ferryman managed to escape, but the poor little girl was drowned. Miss Markham was quite insensible from her immersion and the cold; she was taken into Mrs. Wyatt's, and by

means of hot baths and brandy happily restored to consciousness.

There is a very picturesque old house close to the church, at the end of the backwater after the lawns are past, and here also is a remarkably fine old barn, which has formed the subject of many a sketch. There is a curious old square pond with a little outlet into the backwater close to the churchyard, which looks as if it might formerly have been a private fishpond : it is now quite surrounded by fine elm trees. In this secluded place it was that I saw the otter before mentioned ;* he ran along amongst the bushes on the banks here, in the way water-rats do, and the large perch I picked up out of the water which then flooded the meadow as far as the railway embankment.

The main stream has in the meantime been left quite neglected, as we have been passing up the little backwater. The islands off Bolney Court are a very pretty cluster ; I call them islands, because they have grass and trees on them—eyots proper I should say, were those covered only with osiers. Mr. Vicat Cole had last year in the Academy exhibition a very beautiful picture from the Bolney Islands, the truth of which I recognized in an instant ; these islands my children christened “The Balmy Isles of Rumtifoo,” from the Bab Ballad, partly because we there found warm sheltered corners for lunch or tea. The river bends a little way above these islands, and the green lane from Shiplake Station is on the right hand close by ; then comes, or came, for I do not know whether it still exists, a creek leading into some ponds belonging to a fellmonger’s establishment ; these ponds I never explored, as the smell was decidedly fellmongery. The tow-path with its bank

* Chapter III.

fishermen, which is on the Berks shore past the Bolney Islands, changes sides just above the fellmongery. A sad accident occurred at the ferry here not very long ago, resulting in the drowning of a poor footman, who with a little boy came down here from Wargrave in a wretched canoe ; the boy was saved, but the poor man was drowned. I saw him, brought up to Mrs. Wyatt's for the inquest, and also the canoe, and I cannot conceive the folly of a man and a boy going out in such a craft, as it was exceptionally small, and very old and rotten.

On several of the eyots about here, and below Marsh and Hambledon Locks, the beautiful summer snowflake can be found in May, a doubtful native according to the books, but often seen in gardens ; it is a sort of polyanthus snowdrop, and a bunch of them looks very pretty.

After the ferry there is nothing noticeable about the stream except its turns and twists, until you reach Wargrave. The bank fishermen are very fond of the steep cliff banks over the eddies on the tow-path side, and as the punting is good on the other, it is best to keep there.

At Wargrave, the river, which has been running nearly north and south all the way between here and Henley, takes a smart turn to the west, away towards Reading ; this turn makes the difficulties of punting rather great just at the bend, and I know no greater test of a punter's skill, than in coming down from the railway bridge to bring up handsomely without any hitch or contretemps, at Mrs. Wyatt's wharf, on which the whole stream from the west pours its strength.

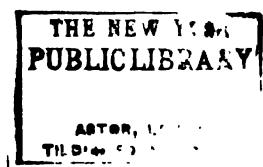
The railway bridge being of wood is by no means an eyesore on the river, but I do not think it a very safe one in a winter flood, in passing under it at which times it seems as if

the weight of water must carry it away, and if any large piece of the weir or lock were to give way, and drifting down, strike on the timbers of the bridge at the time a train was passing across, I would not give much for the chance of escape of its passengers. I think one or two piles placed as outposts to the piers on the upper side, would very likely break the force of the blow, and might save the bridge ; it is the nearness of the weir and lock to the bridge which suggests the likelihood of such a mishap.

The river Loddon flows into the Thames on the left-hand side, and Shiplake Mill and Lock are on the right ; the stream in the Loddon is very strong ; in going up it, if you take the first turning to the right that you come to, it will lead you back into the main river again, half-way up between Shiplake and Sonning. This backwater is called St. Patrick's Stream—why I do not know ; it is a very peculiar backwater, because it flows from the Thames itself into a tributary stream, and, united with the waters of the tributary, rejoins the main stream below the weir. I know of no other backwater on the river by which you can avoid going through a lock ; the stream in St. Patrick's Water is very strong, falling as it does all the way without arrest, whereas the main stream has a weir on it, with a fall of three feet six inches. It is perhaps best to explore this stream on the down journey, as the labour of going up it is great. The character of this little river is not very varied or interesting, but you meet no steam-launches, the water is clear, and there is an air of general wildness about it. The only object of interest on it, is an old farmhouse about half-way up, with a little bridge over another small stream which flows also from the Thames, from above the weir ; you cannot pass, however, by this to the



St. Patrick's Stream, Ship Lake.



main river, on account of a small weir across it. Burrow Marsh, as this farm-house is called, has lately become the summer residence of my friend Mr. W. Field the artist, a younger son of the late Edwin Field; he comes down here also in the winter occasionally, for the purposes of fishing and wild-duck shooting.

St. Patrick's Stream, if followed up, after a number of turnings brings you out into the main river beneath a little wooden foot-bridge; the place is so concealed with rushes, that in coming down, if you do not look well out for the little foot-bridge, it is most likely you will miss it altogether. In the meadows about the Loddon and the St. Patrick's Stream in the spring time the beautiful fritillary or snake's head can be found growing in great abundance; it is a most engaging flower, something between a wood-anemone and a tulip, generally of a brownish chocolate colour, with pale spots on it, but sometimes pure white; this flower is admirably suited for the embroiderer's art, and I confidently recommend it to young ladies of a "crewel" disposition.

To return to Shiplake Mill and Lock. The mill is a fine specimen of a Thames mill, having plenty of nice woodwork about it; the lock is at present kept by an old man-of-war's man, who has erected a flagstaff in his garden, and hoists the colours on it in orthodox fashion. Little camping parties are here generally found; the view of the mill from the weir water behind the lock is a good one, and the whole of this water with its eyots will repay inspection. Above the lock, Shiplake is passed; it stands away from the river on the top of a small hill; some nice houses, and the church, are all I have ever seen of it. The view from the church is fine; this church is celebrated as being the one in which our Poet Laureate was married. There is an island just

above the weir ; the best punting course is to make for this island, passing it on the Berkshire side, and then cut across to the Oxford side on which the tow-path is, making as straight a course as you can. I mention this, as the other side by the tow-path is longer, and the ground very muddy. But the punting is not good anywhere until you get above the island, the water being all very deep. For those towing, there is near here a very awkward place, like many others of the same description on the river, wherever a sharp bend occurs, and the tow-path runs a good way in shore, with a large swampy piece of sedges and rushes between it and the river edge ; what usually happens is, that the tracker walks along until he has passed these rushes, and finds himself suddenly brought to a standstill by the boat having become jammed up into the soft bank. Those in the boat endeavour to push off, but each time they do so, the tracker pulls them in again. The proper way to pass these bits, is for the tracker to stop when he comes to the commencement of the objectionable piece, and for the people in the boat to commence at once to row or shove, the tracker walking slowly along, keeping level with the boat, and holding the line slack.

All the way up from Shiplake to Sonning the stream is exceedingly strong, the river bending and twisting considerably, with a number of eyots situated in the sharp turns. Much ingenuity on the part of the punter is called for in taking advantage of the many eddies ; it is one of the great attractions of punting, that the very sharpness of the stream against you always has its counter balance in your favour by the many eddies ; in these bends, with a proper knowledge of the ground, a punter can easily hold his own against an ordinary rowing boat, which must necessarily keep oar's length from the bank.

For my own part I prefer punting against the stream to going with it, provided I am in no hurry, as the art is far more varied and scientific.

Just above the second group of eyots, the entrance to St. Patrick's Water can be found amongst the rushes on the Berkshire side; beyond these eyots the river recovers its straightness again, and between here and Sonning there is nothing remarkable. The view of the church and bridge from the tow-path is one of the best composed groups for a landscape painter I ever saw. Mr. Keeley Halswelle painted a small picture of this bit, which hung up for some time at the Arts Club, and I admired it very much; the whole group was given without any alterations, and one could not have desired a line away or a single mass added to. There are two bridges at Sonning which connect the island of Aberlash House and mill with the main land on either side; an old brick one on the left, and the other a rambling wooden one over the weir water, which above this bridge is very broad and shallow, and filled with watercress and forget-me-nots. The stream beyond the brick bridge is quite different in character; it is very sluggish and solemn, low down in its banks, and overhung with evergreens on the Aberlash side. There is generally some difficulty in obtaining a bed at the "White Hart," and if the little "French Horn" Inn is also full, there is nothing for it but to sleep in the "Butchers' Arms" up the village, which sounds worse than it really is, as the accommodation is not bad there. I generally manage to lunch at the "White Hart" if possible, as the coffee-room with its polished tables and pretty bow window is most inviting, and the little tables out in the garden beneath the arbours are equally pleasant if the weather is fine; when we lived at

Wargrave, this was a great place to come to for tea and gooseberries.

Mr. Marks and I, on the visit which we paid to Wargrave, one fine October, rowed up to Sonning, and had the pleasure of witnessing a grand wedding there; the miller's daughter from Aberlash House was the bride, and the bridge was decorated with arches of flowers and evergreens. We stood beside the little west porch of the church amongst the crowd, and saw the wedding party pass in; the floor of the porch was ankle deep with flowers, scattered from the baskets of village maidens, the bells ringing merrily and the sun shining, as it always should on these occasions.

The great tall trees of Holme Park rise up behind the church, and form the shuggest of backgrounds to the church tower, and the tow-path for a good distance past the lock, is beneath the shade of these trees. The lock itself is a nice new one, much celebrated for its roses and bees, which are both cultivated and attended to by Mr. Sadler the lock-keeper; this old gentleman is a great character on the river, and possesses a variety of accomplishments. He has paid great attention to the roses in his garden, having budded a number of the finest varieties, some of which may be seen blowing amongst the withies along the river banks, budded on to the original wild-rose stems wherever they happen to grow. Mr. Sadler is likewise a great bee-master and maker of bee-hives of a very ornamental character. Besides being known as a rose grower and bee-master, he lays claim to celebrity as a poet, having written several Georgic strains on the care and management of bees and roses, and other verses which he calls "Summer Recreations," one of which, No. 5, contains a capital description of a

trip down the Thames from Oxford to Windsor. This commences with a sentiment with which I most cordially agree :—

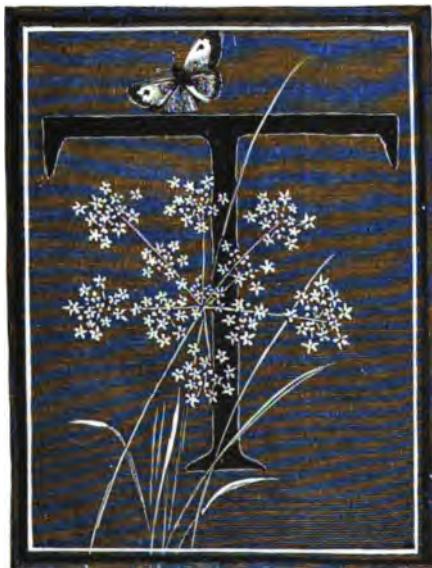
“ For strange and novel beauties
So widely people roam,
And often miss the loveliest spots
That lie about their home.
We aim not to disparage
Or weaken other claims,
But where can fairer scenes be found
Than on the river Thames ? ”

He then goes on to describe the various places of interest passed on the trip, some of the descriptions of which are singularly neat and appropriate, as for instance that on Reading :—

“ From hence the town of Reading
Is just one field across,
'Mong other things so widely known
For biscuits, seeds, and sauce.”

CHAPTER VI.

FROM SONNING TO SUTTON COURTNEY.—READING.—THE KENNET.—VISIT TO RAMSBURY WITH H. S. MARKS.—CAVERSHAM BRIDGE.—THE “ROEBUCK.”—HORSE BOATS.—DREDGING BOATS.—MAPLE DURHAM.—HOUSE BOATS.—HARDWICK.—PANGBOURNE.—OSIER FARM.—WILLOWS AND OSIERS.—GORING.—STREATLEY.—THE ARTISTS.—MOULSFORD.—WALLINGFORD.—SHEEP-WASHING.—BENSON.—SHILLINGFORD.—THE TOLL-KEEPER.—DAY’S LOCK.—THE THAME.—CLIFTON HAMPDEN.—CULHAM LOCK.—SUTTON POOLS.



HE reaches between Sonning and Caversham are not very interesting. Soon after the lock at the former place is passed, the “famous town of Reading” becomes unpleasantly visible, and the embankment of the Great Western Railway nears the river. The stream is sluggish, the water dirty, and the punting anything but

good, many of the banks on the tow-path side being fringed with the soft sedges so frequently mentioned in this book as a bad sign for the punter. There are one or two little eyots and backwaters on the right just beyond the lock, where white water-

lilies grow when allowed to do so by the townspeople. Reading folks do not seem much addicted to aquatics, and the boats let out for hire about here are just the sort to suit what Mr. Calderon used to call "drowning parties." Just below Caversham Lock the river twists about, and on the tow-path side are very steep clay cliffs, worn into large concavities by the stream and its eddies, care being necessary in punting lest the disgrace should happen of a lot of crumbling clay getting lodged on the nose of the punt by bumping against the bank.

No one judging from the ignominious junction of the Kennet with the Thames would imagine what a pretty, cheerful stream it is nearer to its source. In the vale of Newbury, and by Hungerford and Marlborough, it wanders about in most picturesque fashion, at times expanding into quite broad waters, at others spreading out into numerous small rills for the purpose of irrigating the meadows. It is celebrated for its trout, and was beloved by Kingsley and many another of the angling fraternity.

In the spring of 1878, Mr. Marks and myself paid a sketching visit to the Kennet at a place called Ramsbury, not far from the romantic old house of Littlecote, through the park of which the river flows. At Ramsbury is an old manor house, said to be the birthplace of Lady Burdett-Coutts, and belonging when we were there to Sir Francis Burdett. At present it is uninhabited, but in it is a quantity of fine old furniture and china, all much neglected. Some cases of stuffed birds amused Mr. Marks very much; moths or other small insects had got at them, and eaten away every bit of the soft parts of the feathers, and the parchment-like skins of the birds, with the prominent glass eyes and the bristling skeletons of the feathers, gave

these objects an indescribably hobgoblin effect. There was an old summer-house, in the roof of which bats by the thousand lived, and a brew-house with a wheel pump in it, by which water, and beer, were forced through pipes into the house. The house is a good specimen of architecture of the time of Wren, being of red brick with stone facings ; at the end of the garden the Kennet expands into a beautifully wooded lake.

Just beyond Caversham Lock there is a walled-in bathing-place for the town of Reading. The river is decidedly ugly here, and does not recover itself until after Caversham Bridge is past. This bridge in old times was one of the most picturesque on the whole river ; I have heard it described by people who remember it. The present bridge is ugly enough, being built with iron girders and pillars. A stone in the brick abutment bears the date 1747, with the names of the Mayor and Chamberlain at the time, but this obviously refers to the old bridge, which was of wood, with a large old-fashioned gate-house in the middle, on a sort of island. The island exists, and a little boat-letter's cottage and garden on the other side are not without the charms of age.*

Above the bridge the water is broad and deep. A quaint old garden runs along the Oxfordshire shore for some length ; the meadows on the other side, which are flat right away to the railway, are much flooded in the winter. The ground on the Oxfordshire side is steep, small chalk cliffs showing themselves here and there. The road to Whitchurch runs on this side near the river ; there is a quaintly built modern boat-house on this

* As at night all cats are grey, so this bridge on a fine night assumes quite a grand appearance ; the silhouette as viewed from the upper side possessing some very fine lines.

shore, the room over the water being very prettily conceived. A boat-house is such a pleasant thing for an architect to design, that I wonder at seeing so few that appeal to our better tastes. The high ground on the Oxfordshire side is here covered for a good distance with fine Scotch firs. A little way beyond the pretty boat-house a cluster of eyots is reached, termed by its former proprietor (Professor Pepper, of the Polytechnic), "The Fishery." The Professor was very anxious, judging by the number of notice-boards, to keep the waters about these eyots very much to himself; but they can be explored if you wish. They do not possess very much interest, however, and as we are fast coming to some of the loveliest spots on the whole river, it is best, perhaps, to hasten on and leave "The Fishery" alone. The stream soon begins to run with a will above this spot, and the Great Western, which has been threatening for some time, here closes up to the river; this is not of much consequence, however, as far as the scenery is concerned, for the railway very soon dives into a deep cutting, becoming the very opposite of what a good little boy should be, namely, "heard but not seen."

The river narrows up into a gorge as the "Roebuck" is reached. This quaint little inn has not much to recommend it, beyond its convenient station as a resting-place. Its situation is peculiar, the house being on the further side of the railway, with steps up and down to reach it from the river.

I have a great affection for horse-boats, those old clumsy things that are found all the way up the river wherever the tow-path changes sides. I suppose I like them because they are akin to the punt. They are very picturesque, and with the little house that is sometimes seen near them, for the ferryman to

live in, form good objects for the foreground of a sketch ; groups of children are often seen hanging about, adding very much to the beauty of the composition. There are two of these ferry boats just above the "Roebuck" Inn, and the second one affords a capital platform for bathing purposes, as the water is deep and very clear and free from weeds, better as a bathing-place than the weirs and lashers so often used, which are at all times exceedingly dangerous, on account of the back sucks, old sunken piles, &c. It is not so difficult as it looks to punt one of these boats across the river. I have noticed that just where one of these horse ferries occurs, if the generality of the bottom of the river is muddy, and the water deep, good hard ground is found, and it is quite a treat to come upon it. I do not know whether this is an artificial bottom, put down for the purpose of the ferry, or whether the ferry has been chosen at this spot on account of there being a good crossing there. Much may be said for or against either hypothesis, but I am rather inclined to believe that stones are put down, from the fact that very often the mud occurs immediately above and below the crossing. Nearly allied to the horse-boat is the dredging punt, not so large, but quite as clumsy in construction ; it is used not only for improving the bed of the river, but for the value of the ballast that is drawn up. Two men form the working crew of one of these boats ; one guides a long pole, which has a sort of iron-bound purse at its end, and a small winch attached to the side of the boat, worked by the other man, raises this scoop by means of a line. The operation goes on until the boat is loaded quite down to the water's edge ; occasionally the men have to bale out the water which drains from the stones. The boat is moored by short stout wrypicks, and moved by punting or

towing. I have never heard of any accident occurring to these ballasters from the wash of a steam launch, but I should think that when the dredging punt is down nearly to the water's edge, it would not take much swell to sink it.

The gravel and sand are taken ashore and placed in a heap, from which a quantity of water drains away ; the heap is then

*Ballast Dredgers.*

sifted to get out the sand, the most valuable part, and which is sold by the yard for building purposes. You may easily tell good river ballast from other sand by the little pieces of charcoal in it, which are really small fragments of boughs of trees carbonized beneath the water. This river ballast makes capital sand for mixing in garden composts ; the coarser gravel is used for concrete. The foundations of river-bank houses are very often raised by loads of stuff dredged out from the river, and in consequence a new house on the river should always be pointed past with care and circumspection, as the deep-dredged holes

are very sudden ; your pole sinking into them so much deeper than is expected, may possibly cause you to go over the side of your boat. Dredging is very hard work at any time, but it must be miserable in the winter, which is the time when many boatmen and fishermen take to it for want of other employment : I sincerely hope they manage to make it pay.

The river from the "Roebuck" to Maple Durham is of perfect beauty ; overhung with wide spreading trees, its banks decorated with flowers of every sort, the water as clear as could be wished, with dark streaming weeds curling and swirling beneath, the poetry of the whole heightened by occasional glimpses of the romantic old house of Maple Durham ; these beauties, together with the sound of rooks and cooing of wood-pigeons, render this a spot dear to all river-lovers' memories. There is only one thing to wish for when passing this lovely spot ; that in it you may not meet a hateful steam launch, fouling the water with its screw, scaring the rooks with its discordant whistle, blackening the air with its dirty smoke, and robbing the view of all its calm sentiment and beauty.

I have never been inside Maple Durham House, though I once trespassed a little, in order to have a good look at its outside ; but somehow I like it all the better for not having seen its inside. It is enough for me that the Blounts have lived there so long. I like to keep its interior as I fancy it in my mind, ghost-haunted, and invested with the glamour of mystery. I am afraid lest the real inside might be too modern, too comfortable, and that Martha Blount would not be found at her needle-work with her old aunts. The outside is seen just enough from the river to make you wish for more, and set the fancy at work ; I always pass by it with a little of the feeling that I had as a child

towards the door of a dark cellar in the house where I was born. Long may Maple Durham remain to me thus, embosomed in its mysterious trees, with many ghosts of Blounts, of different ages, for its tenants, the plashing of the waters and cawing of the rooks as its only sounds. Many old houses and castles are better when only seen from the outside. I remember the effect Warwick Castle had on me when I first saw it; it was a week or two before I visited the interior; the outside, as seen from the river or bridge by day or night, has no equal for its romantic beauty; but once inside, with guide-book in hand, and tip-expecting housekeeper to show you round, the disillusionment is complete.

Maple Durham Church has an aisle or side chapel in it, still reserved for the entombment of the Blount family, which is an old Catholic one, the church, in this respect, resembling the one at Arundel, about which so much litigation has been going on of late. It is a sweet little church. The living, with its comfortable vicarage, is one of the fat things in the gift of Eton College. The mill is only a trifle too picturesque, if I may be allowed to say so, as it reminds one a little of the small paper models of old buildings which are sold by artists' colourmen for young ladies to draw from. The lock is picturesque, with a nice old lock-keeper. But this pretty corner of the river is dreadfully marred by an ugly little iron bridge for the tow-path; if it had only been of wood, no harm would have been done. It is very hard that this place, of all others, should have been singled out for the display of improved modern construction. Just above the lock, a friendly row of trees casts an agreeable shade across the river and tow-path; here a small island is reached, a favourite resting-place for camping parties. The attractions of Maple

Durham also induce possessors of house-boats to anchor there. I am glad to say, they generally have the taste to moor above the lock, so as not to interfere with the beauty of the scene below. In all my river experiences I have never tried one of these boats, but they have their charms, no doubt, and much fine, independent pleasure may be got out of them. They look inviting and snug with their little windows and curtains, their bird cages and pots of flowers, the smoke curling up from the kitchen chimney and the cooking and washing up going on inside ; but I cannot help thinking it must be a little tedious, and I have observed, that if not employed on some active business, such as cleaning or cooking, the occupants very often wear rather a blasé expression. There is rather a significant thing about these boats, which is, that after one year's trial they are frequently abandoned, great numbers being often seen at anchor quite tenantless.

Of course there are house-boats and house-boats. Some of the great saloon barges, varnished and gilt, and furnished with profuse magnificence, refrigerators, pianos, &c., with kitchen in a separate boat and a host of attendant servants, appear sadly out of place on the river, and make one suspect that the proprietors are gentlemen with a penchant for yachting, but deterred from the marine indulgence of their hobby by dread of sea-sickness. In a moderate-sized house-boat an artist or any one fond of the river ought to be pretty happy, especially if he is not above doing a lot of things for himself, as it is precisely the novelty of such work which gives the whole charm to this mode of life ; and in any case house-boats are in no sense open to the objections of the steam launch.

After passing the island the reach opens out wide and stately, the railway has politely retired to a distance, and the rich woods and hills on the right form magnificent backgrounds. In among the trees at the foot of the hills may be seen the smoke from the chimneys of the fine old red-brick house of Hardwick ; a broad opening has been kindly made through the elms in front of the house, through which a good view of its quaint gables is obtained from the river ; like most old houses it gains considerably in effect as the sun's rays get low. When the wind ceases to ruffle the water, the smoke rises through the elms in a straight column, and the rooks return to their homes ; then too can be heard the sound of an old clock bell tanging the hours and quarters. Hardwick lacks the hidden mystery of Maple Durham, but has a stately charm of its own which is quite as good in its way.

The water is not very deep from here to the bridge at Pangbourne, and has many beds of round rushes growing in it, which indicate a good hard gravel, suitable for punting. These round rushes when not growing too thick are very pleasant to punt through, the sound of them rattling and rubbing along the sides of the boat having a soothing effect on anyone lying in the stern. Children in boats always want to pick them ; they call them fishing-rods. When you pull rushes they frequently come up from their roots, sometimes six or seven feet long, and a variety of amusement can be got out of them by plaiting or pealing ; a sort of little boat can be made by flattening and winding them round themselves into an oblong form, with the end stuck up through it for a mast, which pleases children very much. A house which lately belonged to Mr. Willan is at the end of this reach near the

bridge on the right-hand side. I remember sketching in the garden of this house, when it belonged to two old ladies named Pigou, the attraction to me being certain espaliers of apple and pear trees of great beauty. The garden of this house has been very much altered, and is now redundant with modern finery. The bridge which unites Pangbourne with Whitchurch is of wood, and I am happy to state in good repair. On the Oxfordshire side is the village of Whitchurch, which straggles up the steep hill; the church, with its little wooden spire, and the mill, with finely grown trees around it, lying snug by the water's edge; the lock is in the middle of the river, the weir is on the Pangbourne side, with a deep pool below it, and the usual shallow spread below the pool. Into this shallow part the small river or brook "Pang" empties itself by the side of a large timber yard. The little Pang gives much charm to the village, and in some places above is quite worthy of Bewick's pencil.

In the corner of the weir pool is a very old three-storied cottage, formerly the abode of Champ the fisherman; here Mr. Boyce lodged and worked, as mentioned in Chap. I. The old barn he painted from is just half-way up the Whitchurch hill. The village of Pangbourne lies back behind the railway; it has two inns, the "George" and the "Elephant," both well known to boating men. The "Swan" by the river is very pretty and unaltered, but beds can hardly ever be obtained there. Mrs. Ashley* of the "Swan" owns several barges, one or two of which may generally be seen at the coal wharf, helping the old-fashioned look of the place very much; the signboard was

* Since dead. Her son, E. T. Ashley, now is landlord of the inn.

painted by Mrs. Seymour Trower, as before mentioned in Chap. III. Pangbourne is on the old road from Alton and Portsmouth to Oxford, and is mentioned in White's "Selborne;" it is pleasant to picture the dear old man jogging along on "Mouse" his mare, by the side of the river, on one of his visits to Oxford, probably much interested in watching the swallows and martins skimming over the surface of the water. The road itself is very pretty from here to Streatley, past Basildon; the railway is not offensive, as it is generally hidden in cuttings. There is also a path from Whitchurch to Goring, well worth trying, if time permits; it passes along the summit of Hart's Wood, and the views are most varied and delightful. Immediately above Pangbourne, the river is hemmed in by a steep chalk hill on the Berkshire side, and the fine oak trees of Combe Lodge on the Oxfordshire side, until a bend is reached where the oak trees end with a good old-fashioned boat-house beneath their shade. From here the waters expand into a grand open reach, with the cliffs and beeches of Hart's Wood at the end of it; the punting is not particularly good. By all means sail if you can, as then the beauty of the view can absorb your whole attention, and be enjoyed in perfect repose.

An osier farm on the right is the first thing reached, with large barns for storing the dried osiers, stacks thatched with bark, and all the usual appliances for rod pealing, &c. This osier farming is still a lucrative river business, and is carried on at many places up the Thames. The withies are cut from the eyots and tied in bundles; they are then carried in punts and placed in a sort of water pound, all close together, with their thick ends in the water; here they shoot out and grow much

longer. At the time of rod pealing the bank presents a very lively appearance, rows of boys and girls and old women, all working away together, drawing the osiers through two pieces of iron, which scrape the bark off quite clean, and it is astonishing to witness the rapidity with which the beautiful white wands come out of their skin ; these white wands are what the wicker baskets and chairs are made from. Wicker work is always in good and artistic taste, as it is a handicraft that machinery has never been able to tackle. I am very glad to see a growing demand for the pretty garden chairs and drawing-room furniture made of wicker-work ; they are light, elegant, and very strong. The late Mr. E. W. Cooke, R.A., when young, learned the art of basket-making, and was quite expert in this line, and I do not see why some of the enterprising young ladies of the present day should not take up this craft. I like all wicker work ; even common hampers afford me pleasure, their aromatic smell when new reminding me of the river.

The vitality of the willow tribe is very remarkable ; I have before now grown withies from old hamper twigs, and you may often notice the little grey catkins coming out in their appointed time on old willow sticks, when stowed away in some dampish place ; the old pollard stumps too, as they fall to pieces, are ever ready to become the parent stocks of a new tree. The smell of an osier farm is to me most pleasant ; it has lately been discovered very wholesome also, for from the willow is made the salicylic acid, so fine as a tonic, and cure for rheumatism. No doubt without this native "blue gum tree" our marsh lands and riversides would be far more aguish and rheumatic than they are. The fibrous roots of willows, seen at

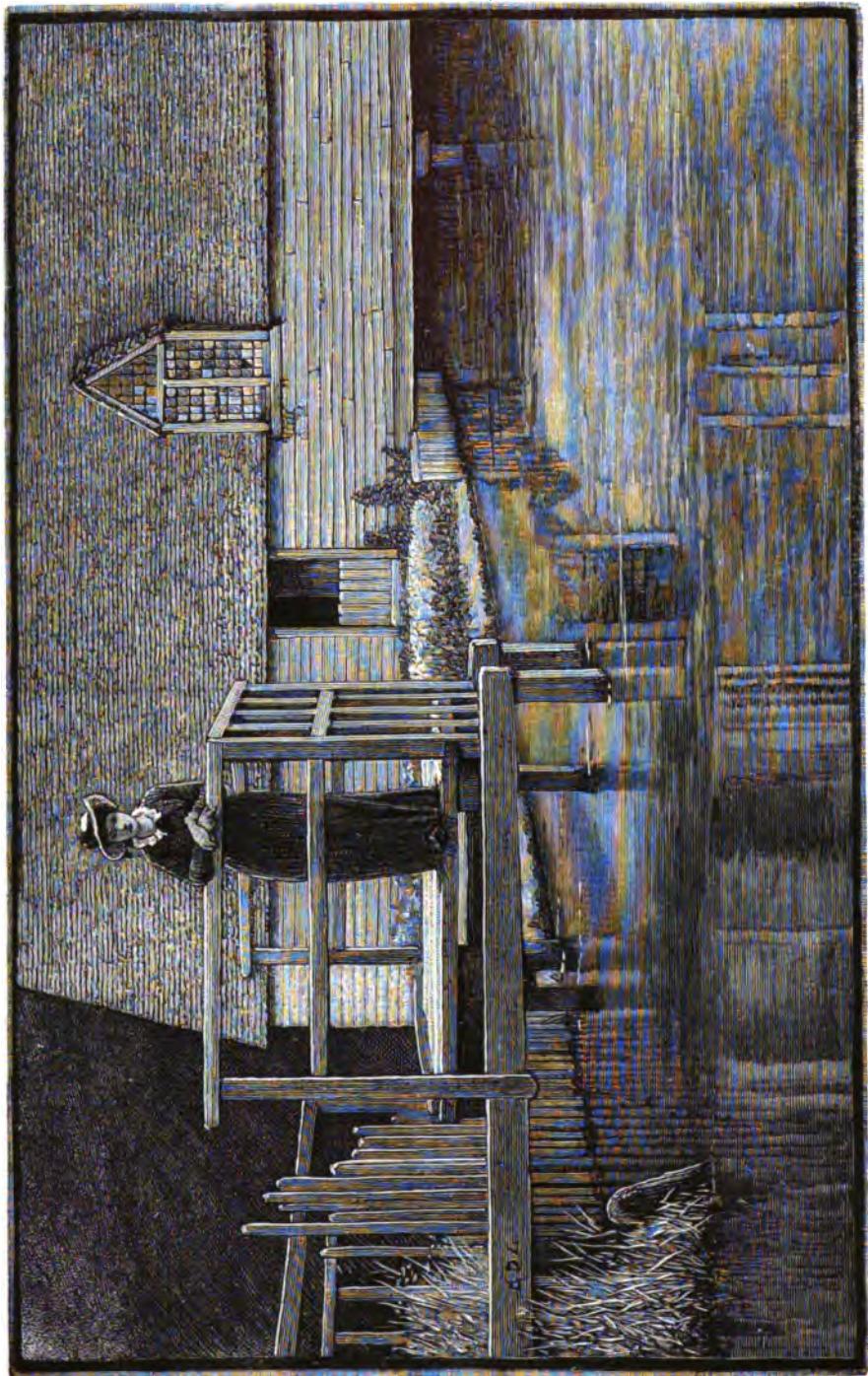
the edges of the river, are of a pretty red colour; I have sometimes taken people in by calling them freshwater coral. There are, I believe, thirty or thirty-five known sorts of willows in Great Britain, but I know not enough of botany to trouble my readers with their names. I have a great predilection for one variety, which in beauty exceeds all the others on the river; * this is not the ordinary useful osier used in basket-work, the leaves of which are long and narrow, but a much more bushy sort, with leaves and foliage more like the myrtle. It possesses far greater variety in its growth, and its colour is more refined and delicate than other sorts. The leaf-stems are golden-coloured when young, the leaves of a dull olive on the upper side and pale grey beneath; at the end of each little shoot one or two leaves are tipped with golden orange. The whole shrub grows beautifully, and forms fine masses and shapes; it takes far more light and shade than its more useful brethren; it does not blow about in such a weak way as the others, which gives such a cold chill to the colour of a bank on a windy day. I am very fond of all the willows except one, and that is the weeping willow so often placed on lawns by the river side, but which only reminds me of tombstones, hair-brooches, and *In Memoriam* cards.

After the osier farm is passed, the beautiful Hart's Wood reach commences, resembling in many respects that of Cliveden. Here are similar eyots in the bend of the river, and on the right beech-woods coming down to the water's edge. There was formerly a lock and weir among these eyots, the narrow passage on the tow-path side being evidently the situation of the lock,

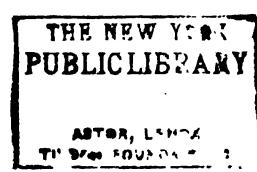
* On referring to a friend's "Sowerby," the Common Grey Sallow seemed to me to be the name of my favourite.

and a few old stumps of piles still exist about the spot. Hart's Wood possesses a Lover's Leap ; it is to be found on the path from Whitchurch to Goring before mentioned, which here runs along for a short distance on the edge of a steep cliff. I never heard who the lover was that leaped. The wooded hill ends much sooner than the celebrated Cliveden range, and great undulating ploughed lands succeed, which fall away gradually as they approach Goring. On the other side of the river, Basildon House is seen in the distance, and the church, rather a solitary one, is a short way from the tow-path on this side of the railway, which here rapidly turns towards the river, to avoid the hills of Streatley, and crosses by a large brick bridge. The tow-path changes sides some way before the railway does, and there is the usual horse-boat and little ferry cabin. The old man, Levi Collins, who formerly kept this ferry, is now at the one at Mill End, near Hambledon. Just before the railway-bridge is reached there are some tremendously deep and sudden holes, no doubt made by the ballast dredging at the time the bridge was built. The bridge is often under repair, as the stones used in the facings seem to be attacked by a sort of falling sickness, large lumps giving way every now and then. When the railway bridge is passed the punting becomes very good, as it certainly is not about the Hart's Wood.

The hills now run on the left bank of the river, right up to Streatley ; the house called the Grotto must be quite familiar to any one who has travelled often on the Great Western line. The house is not very grottoish, or grotesque, but it is a long comfortable white building (recently enlarged) in a perfect situation, with finely timbered grounds, sloping steeply to the water. A walk along the river bank, beneath the trees, is



Stratton Mill.



the place of all others I should choose for a prowl on a fine moonlight night, if I ever became a ghost with walking propensities.

The high ground upon which the Grotto stands runs into the famous Streatley Hill, which forms such a landmark hereabouts, with its little tufts of juniper and numerous flocks of sheep scattered on its sides.

One cannot wonder at the number of artists who are attracted by the many beauties of Streatley and Goring ; the river, the two mills, the bridge, the hill, the eyots and backwaters all lend themselves to the painter's skill, the whole place abounding in rich material for his art. But my pleasure in it, I am ashamed to confess, is considerably lessened by the numbers of sketching tents and white umbrellas that meet the eye, perched on every coign of vantage around this spot : in the sketching season the little coffee-room at the "Swan" has easels and artists' traps in every corner, and the village swarms with geniuses and their æsthetically dressed wives. My friend, Mr. F. Smallfield, wrote some smart verses *à propos* of the want of originality in the choice of subjects at a water-colour exhibition, intended to be sung to the tune of "Yankee Doodle." I forget the verses, but the chorus ran thus :—

" Every soul is sick of Knowle,
At Haddon Hall one grumbles,
Of Streatley Mill we've had our fill,
And murmur at the Mumbles."

Nevertheless the place is lovely, and as yet quite unspoilt by modern improvements ; a lunch at the "Swan" is still a thing to be remembered. The pigeons that feed from your hand, the roses in the garden, the flagstaff, the arbour, the smell of pitch and tar

from the boat-building yard, have still their charms ; the fine hill backing up with majestic shelter the little street, with its variously roofed cottages, amongst which stands one large red-brick house, where the great folks of the village live in stately respectability. I never saw anybody go in or out of this large house, but it has always an exceptionally neat and tidy appearance. On the whole Streatley certainly must be allowed to be a sweet place. The last time I was there was on a glorious autumn day in September, succeeded by a moonlight night equally perfect, and I must say I felt quite ashamed of myself for grudging my artistic brothers the pretty spot.

The water in the short reach between Goring and Cleve Lock is very deep and sluggish, bad of course for punting ; Cleve Mill is on the right, with the house near it in which Edwin Field lived during the summer months. The trees grow grandly amongst the backwaters here, which are marked as usual "Private Water ;" the bathing-board from which the Fields took their headers is still on the island beneath the trees. The lock is on the left bank, and the Mill is a good way below the lock, so as to form above the weir a long piece of retired backwater, on which is a large house and garden, where the Editor of the "World" passes his leisure time ; it is a most covetable spot, for it combines great privacy with immediate proximity to the finest river scenery.

Above Cleve Lock you commence the long weary six miles to Wallingford ; hardly any part of the way can be termed good for punting, and there is nothing at all equal in beauty to what one has so recently passed. If sailing can be accomplished, you are in great luck, as probably with very few hitches you will be able to sail right up to Wallingford. I once sailed the distance in about an hour's time, which against the stream was

very good travelling, but on the return journey my luck was against me, for I had to punt the whole way against a strong head wind, and I do not think I ever had harder work. The bottom is not quite so bad when the railway bridge is reached, but the stream then is very strong. I suspect that at the little cluster of eyots just above the railway there must have been a weir and lock in former times. I should say it would be a far better place for a weir than at Chalmore Hole, where the present one is almost useless. Moulsford Church and the "Beetle and Wedge" Inn are picturesque; it was just off this little inn that the fatal accident happened to Mr. Field. The river beauty has not much to speak of after the railway bridge is passed, and it is all the more aggravating that a large ugly county lunatic asylum should have found a situation here. North Stoke, Little Stoke, and South Stoke, a short distance inland on the Oxfordshire side, are pretty little villages; there are several houses on that side with nice gardens to the river, and as Wallingford is neared, the park-like grounds of Mungwell possess fine trees and considerable beauty. But it is a great relief when one gets up to the queer low weir and lock at Chalmore Hole; the weir is a mere row of rimers and paddles straight across the stream, while the lock as often as not is wide open at each end.

Houses on the Wallingford side commence as soon as the lock is passed; one of these, a large many-windowed house, with fine elm trees about it, has for some years been the residence of my friend Mr. Hayllar, the artist.* He has much improved

* This house was formerly the residence of Sir William Blackstone, author of the "Commentaries." His grandson also lived there; he was member for Wallingford about five-and-twenty years ago.

the beauty of his garden, and the boat-house is very quaint, running askew from the river beneath the shade of the elms, and over its arched entrance is a charming summer-house. Wallingford Bridge is a good old stone one, but the gas-works and spire of the church spoil the effect of the bridge, and give a taint of ugliness to the place, which the fine old town itself does not deserve.

The river here being narrow, and not very deep, I am sometimes puzzled to know where all the water has gone to, as the stream is not particularly strong, and there are immense volumes of water just above Benson Lock, and plenty down below Moulsford. A fine baronial sort of residence built of red brick, standing in a small park, skirts the Oxfordshire shore between Wallingford and Benson.

There is a short cut to Benson for foot passengers from Wallingford along the tow-path, crossing over at the pretty little ferry just below the weir. Near this ferry there is a sheep-wash ; the sheep-washing generally takes place about the end of May, before the summer shearing. It is great fun to look on at the performance ; there are generally two pens above the wash, two divisions in the wash, and a large dripping-pen for the sheep as they come out. At the wash at Ewelme the men seize the sheep by the wool, and raising them up in the air, drop them on their backs into the water, where they float at first like huge corks ; very soon, however, nothing but their heads remains above. They are prodded along with sheep-hooks to a narrow place, on each side of which a man seizes them and ransacks their wool ; he then slips their heads underneath a bar, when they are allowed to swim away to the dripping-ground. On their first landing they stagger and fall with the

immense weight of water carried in their wool ; but they soon get all right, and dry up beautifully white and clean. The whole scene, with the dogs and men, is very lively and amusing.

There is the usual mill at the weir, rather spoilt by the addition of steam power and a huge chimney ; just above the lock the river is positively ugly, notwithstanding that the sweet little Ewelme brook flows in on the right-hand side. Benson Church stands back some distance, and on the edge of the river is a gravel and coal-wharf ; but by all means, if time will allow, land at the lock, and find your way up to the villages of Benson and Ewelme. The two miles by the side of the brook afford a shady, pleasant walk, with interesting cottages all along, the almshouses and old church of Ewelme at the end. The country round about being flat, bare of trees, and very uninteresting, it is quite an unexpected treat to come upon this pretty village lane.

Shillingford and Warborough are situated with regard to themselves and the river in precisely the same manner as Benson and Ewelme, with the exception that there is no brook at Shillingford. The situation of Shillingford Bridge, a fine stone one, is striking, with high rising banks on the left-hand side, and the Sinodun range of chalk hills just behind it. A little inn, the "Swan," is perched up on the Berkshire side of the bridge ; the inn-keeper, Mr. Reynolds, does a very good business in the summer-time, and has lived here for more than forty years, the large walnut-tree on the side of the road by the inn having been planted by him. I had a good long talk with him the last time I was up the river about old friends in the neighbourhood, and of the various changes and improve-

ments ; amongst others, the toll on the bridge had been done away with, and the little toll-house shut up. In former days parties of tramps used sometimes to come to the gate, and one of them offering a halfpenny, would demand the gate to be opened for this legal tender ; but the moment it was undone the lot would make a rush and disappear across the bridge. At night a great number of tricks were played on the poor old toll-keeper. He had a small hole in the window-shutter through which he put his hand to receive the toll ; the roughs thrust mud and stones into it, and one night passed a slip-knot round his wrist, drew his arm out, tied it fast to the post opposite, and so left him.

Above the bridge the river takes a number of irregular bends. On the right there is a broad piece of swampy ground, covered with reeds and reed mace. Reeds are very tropical-looking grass ; the colour of the feathery tufts of bloom is exceedingly harmonious with the leaves, the bloom a purplish brown, and the leaves a cool green. I do not know what is the typical meaning of "a reed shaken by the wind" in the New Testament, but a growth of reeds shaken by the wind gives forth a most refreshing rustling sound, which can be heard across the river.

One end of the village of Shillingford abuts on the river a short distance after the bridge is passed ; a brewery, a few cottages, and a coal wharf, form themselves, with the aid of a barge or two, into a picturesque group, at the place where the village street runs down to the water ; this street or lane connects Shillingford with Warborough. I made a sketch in the garden of an old house here, which, I was told, had formerly belonged to ancestors of Benjamin West, the Quaker President of the Royal Academy. Beyond Shillingford, the river itself becomes,

for about half a mile, almost insignificant, and there is not anything, beyond its general wildness, to delight in until Day's Lock is neared ; I may note, by the way, that I have picked the flowering rush amongst the weeds along the banks near here. As the huge Sinodun Hill, with its clump of trees, is approached, the Berkshire shore becomes more romantic ; a pretty belt of trees runs along by the water's edge, tall black poplars being most conspicuous. Sinodun Hill has been, in the Roman times, strongly fortified. The great wide trenches, with their entrances, are still plainly visible, and fill the mind with wonder and curiosity ; on the other side of the river, the ancient town or camp is marked out, many acres being enclosed by dykes. When here, I am always trying to picture to myself what the place must have looked like when the Romans occupied the land. The river, no doubt, was shallower, and the stream swifter, with natural weirs here and there, probably full of big salmon and trout. Had the Romans galleys or boats ? and what were they like ? The country round was probably mere forest wastes, abounding with wolves and wild cats. The Romans must have been here some time, judging from the extent of their works and the quantities of relics that have been dug up. I saw a number of pieces of Roman pottery, glass bottles, and other things which the Vicar of Dorchester had collected. It is not only the classic nature of the ground that makes this spot memorable ; here it is also that the Isis weds the Thame. The junction of these two rivers is a very quiet sort of affair, the meek little Thame running into the Isis from beneath a humble tow-path bridge, reminding one of a wedding *à la mode* between aristocracy and plutocracy ; the Thame bringing little besides its name and title to its great rich bride the

Isis, with her wealth of waters. I explored the Thame for some distance up when I lived at Dorchester ; it is a quiet little river, with one or two mills on it of some beauty, but in general it runs along in a very ordinary way between rows of pollard willows. Just before Day's Lock there are two islands, with bridges connecting them with both shores. Across these bridges the road runs from Little Wittenham to Dorchester. There is a picturesque cottage on one island, and when all the bridges were of wood the whole place was perfection in an artistic point of view. Lately the bridge on the Oxfordshire side has been rebuilt in iron ; the others alone remain in their original picturesqueness. For those who love panoramic views this is the place to land for the ascent of Sinodun. A good Ordnance map and a strong field-glass will help to make the view far more interesting.

Beyond Day's Lock at first the river is again found rather insipid in character. At a place called Burcott are a few pretty old houses and gardens, and at Clifton Hampden, as if to make up for its dulness, the river suddenly comes out in quite a novel aspect. For a short distance it runs over a bed of hard sandstone ; the little cliff on the Oxfordshire side, from which the village is named, is of this stone, and quite unlike anything else on the river. With its ivy bushes and small church perched on the top, it resembles some of Bewick's vignettes very strikingly. The punting here is peculiar ; mud is a bad thing, but there is such a thing as too hard a bottom, for here the pole rings with a chunk as it strikes the ground, and slips aside without any hold. The water is clear, swift, shallow, and very pleasant to look down into. Great slabs of sandstone are plainly visible, with long green streaming

weeds across them. This sandstone is only found for a very short distance, as it ceases as soon as the lock is reached.

The bridge is of red brick, with ribbed Tudor arches, which will become very beautiful when age has toned them a little. The lock is a very short distance above the bridge, but the weir is a long way further up, the weir water coming round a considerable bend on the left, skirting the village of Long Wittenham. Above the lock the navigation is conducted with a short cut by a narrow canal. In this canal are two small wooden bridges, exceedingly awkward in case you are towing, as the path goes behind the piers. The sides of this canal are very steep; puff-balls grew plentifully on the banks the last time I was there, of which great numbers had been kicked or thrown into the water, a literal "casting your bread on the waters," as these puff-balls are very good and wholesome food.

Another long and monotonous reach of three miles (though the absence of interest makes it seem quite four) brings you to Culham Lock, which has the deepest fall of any on the river, namely seven feet. The navigation here is conducted by another cut, as at Clifton Lock, the river itself bending away to the left, underneath a fine old stone bridge. Here, out of the track of steam-launches, the water, though rather shallow at first, is clear and bright, and the stream strong, but after passing the mill on the left hand, the stream slackens; there is an assemblage of wild pools and islands, with three lashers on the further bank at a little distance from one another. On the water's edge above the weir lies the village of Sutton Courtney, well worth a visit if time permits.

The Mill is dated 1847. Here they turn all sorts of old tar-paulins, tarred ropes, and rags into brown paper; the smell at

times, when near it, is unpleasant, and I am sorry the miller, not content with the magnificent water power at his disposal, has erected a great ugly chimney, the smoke from which blackens and spoils this otherwise charming spot. I had great difficulty in obtaining a bed at Sutton Courtney, as the only inn of any pretensions was at the time of my visit being rebuilt ; the church also, which stands close to the inn, had its roof off, and seemed likely soon to have very little of its original self left. I did at last find very nice snug lodgings at a Mrs. Hirst's on the green ; she was the widow of a former landlord of the "Elephant," at Pangbourne, and made me very comfortable during my short stay.

The village is full of quaint old houses, straggling along for nearly a mile ; at one end of it a small brook flows into the river. There are here the remains of an old manor house, formerly belonging to the monks of Abingdon ; it is called by the natives the "Abbey." There is at present a good gabled house built on the spot, with fine barns and an old picturesque gateway. I heard owls hooting at night ; the whole place is highly suggestive of bygone times. Sutton Courtney seems a great place for old barns, and I could not help thinking how much my friend Mr. Boyce would like it.

If you propose to pay a visit to this place in a boat, the best plan is to come down to it from Abingdon, as there is no place to leave your boat below the weir, nearer than the lock.

I think if some of the many artists who devote their attention to Streatley, would try a pitch up at Sutton, they might amongst the pools, the old village and the meadows between the lock and the weir, find ample scope for some fresh subjects of river scenery.

I do not propose to give any description of the river from Culham to Oxford, for though I have travelled through it often enough, I have never resided for any length of time at any place on its banks; and my readers must bear in mind that this work is not intended as a guide-book for the river, being simply a record of my own personal experiences on its loved waters.

CHAPTER VII.

NOTES ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE RIVER.—SWANS.—MOOR-HENS.—KINGFISHERS.—WOOD-PIGEONS.—SMALL BIRDS.—SWALLOWS.—FLY-CATCHERS.—WRENS.—LAPWINGS.—HERONS.—SWALLOWS AND MARTINS.—SWALLOW KILLED BY PARASITES.—RATS.—WATER RATS.—DRAGON-FLIES.—CLIFF GARDENS.—OUR FISH-POND.—GOLD FISH.—SMALL FISH.—JACK.—GUDGEON.—BARBEL.—CHUB.—TROUT.—WATER WEEDS.—GNATS AND MIDGESES.—THE SPIDER AND THE MIDGESES.—CRAWFISH.—WASPS.—RIVER FLIES.—BEES.—VITALITY OF THE JACK.



HAMES fishermen in general entertain hostile feelings towards swans on the river, believing that they eat the spawn of the fish. Whether the spawn is thus destroyed or not I do not know, but it is found necessary for the City Companies, to whom a great part of these swans belong, to pay fees to certain watermen

and millers' men for protecting the swans' nests during the breeding season. The swan hopping or upping, which takes place every year, is a cruel remnant of the customs of old times, and it would be well if it could be dispensed with; setting aside the pain inflicted on the tender bill of the bird, there is

much cruelty practised in catching the swans, which is performed in a very clumsy fashion with long hooks, by men who have little or no feeling for the poor birds. I am astonished to see respectable members of the old City Companies, accompanied by ladies and children on pleasure barges, regarding the scene with perfect complacency ; let them if they like by all means have a pleasant outing on the river, with all the pomp and ceremony that belongs of right to city dignitaries, but let them dispense with the boatmen and their swan-hooks, who dash about after the swans in every direction, the men encouraged to their work by frequent potations of beer. For days after an upping, the poor swans seem greatly depressed, and remain sulking in out-of-the-way corners.

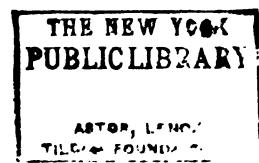
Swans are first-rate parents, and guard their nests and young most boldly. When the young cygnets are newly hatched, it is a pretty sight to watch the manœuvres of the mother to hide them, as she swims past you, always managing to get between your boat and her young ; sometimes she takes them on her back between her expanded wings, carrying them most comfortably thus. Tom swans, or "cobs," at this period seem to spend their whole time in endeavours to drive away the young swans of the previous year. The Tom is constantly seen in pursuit of one or two of these younger birds ; wings and feathers puffed out, his head drawn back, he goes surging along after them ; they generally catch sight of their pursuer a long way off, thus getting a good start. When pretty close to them he finishes the chase by flying about a hundred yards along the top of the water, but seldom succeeds in catching them, and gives up the chase when they have either landed, or as soon as he deems them sufficiently far from his peculiar beat. Staying the pursuit he

stands up, as it were, in his stirrups, giving his whole body a tremendous shake ; he then subsides with a wag of his tail, and rejoins the female and her young. In a very short time, however, the youngsters return to the prohibited waters, and the farce of driving them away is commenced all over again. When a batch of young swans is situated between the beats of two jealous papa swans, they have a very warm time of it, being driven constantly backwards and forwards all day long. Swans are sometimes seen flying quite high up in the air, with their necks straight out ; I believe these are young birds, driven to desperation by their uncomfortable quarters, seeking fresh fields and pastures new. The upping barges take away a great many of the superfluous swans ; packed in baskets with their heads out, they look exceedingly miserable on the decks of the barges, not at all relishing the pats and caresses which are bestowed on them by the visitors. The feathers round the neck of the swan are not of so pure a white as those on the body ; at least they appear of a yellower tone. I have heard a reason given for this—that it is because swans feed with their heads under water, and thus the neck feathers get stained ; but I am inclined to think this is not the true reason, as those parts of the body which are under water perpetually, are not stained at all. The warm tone of the neck, I believe, really proceeds from the fact that the short velvety feathers on that part, not being so close-fitting as the body feathers, appear yellower from the warm shadows showing through them.*

* In a severe winter, like the last, the swans suffer much, at times even getting frozen in the ice, where the men who have to look after them catch them with ropes and take them to a straw-yard until the weather moderates. In the page woodcut of the three swans I have endeavoured to give a translation, in black and white, of an instantaneous photograph by Messrs. Marsh of Henley.



Thames Swans



Another bird which is still common on the river, in spite of the boys and guns, is the little moor-hen. I am very fond of watching a brood of these running about on the water-lily leaves in some out-of-the-way nook. The parent birds build their nests in a most innocent manner, trusting to the slight show they make for protection from harm. Anchored one day at Streatley, sketching, quite by chance I perceived almost at arm's length amongst the rushes a moor-hen's nest, with the parent bird sitting on its eggs quite unmoved. The nest was merely some dried grass bundled in a tangle half-way up a bunch of rushes, the tops of one or two being bent down and woven into the nest to keep it in its place; it did not show at all at any distance, and it was only because the nose of my punt made a slight opening in the rushes that I caught sight of the nest. I did not disturb the bird, and it never moved until I got up to go home. The big dogs that people *will* take with them when boating, go splashing and rummaging along by the banks, doing much useless mischief by disturbing these pretty little birds, and with the boys and their guns are gradually causing their extinction, as well as that of many other interesting feathered inhabitants of the river. Kingfishers are getting scarcer and scarcer every year, though a good many may still be seen in the more secluded backwaters. I was lucky enough once whilst sketching to see one perched quite close to me on the end of a branch over the water. He remained for several minutes perfectly still, not more than a couple of dozen feet from where I was. I was struck by his resemblance to a very beautiful coloured drawing I possess of the bird, done by Bewick. Generally the only view obtained of the kingfisher is as he darts along up the stream like a small

blue meteor. Numbers of these birds are seen in a stuffed condition ornamenting the coffee-rooms of the river-side inns, but the brilliancy of the appearance of the live bird, when seen near, is very different to that of the mangy specimens in the glass cases ; the peculiar shape too is very seldom rendered accurately.

Wood-pigeons are common enough at most parts of the river ; great numbers have their nests in the Cliveden and Hart's Woods. As these fine large birds are very frequently seen crossing the river they present most tempting objects to the river-gun pests, and I frequently pass the dead bodies of the birds floating amongst the rushes, the poor creatures, most probably having been only wounded, died a lingering death. Young wood-pigeons make an excellent pie, and as there are plenty to spare of these birds, I do not object to careful sportsmanship in the matter ; it is the random shots at anything that turns up that are to be deprecated.

There are a great many sorts of small birds that live among the willows and sedges—willow wrens, willow chats, and sedge birds. I am not sufficiently ornithological to be able to distinguish the varieties. The birds themselves are seen very seldom, and only for an instant at a time, but by floating very gently along, occasional peeps at the restless little things can be obtained, their continually repeated little pipes and shrill notes being always heard ; one sort there is, but what I do not know,* which keeps up a sharp shrill cheeping note amidst the willows on the eyots, all day and all night too. I heard it night after night at Mrs. Copeland's, where I usually slept with my window open. Walker and I christened it the "Scissors" bird, from its

* Probably the sedge bird mentioned by Gilbert White.

sharp, reiterated notes. I have often seen the pretty little nests of these small birds. I once found one that was built in the fork of a dock plant; its outside looked merely like a bunch of dried grass caught up out of the water in a flood, but the inside was very neat and compact; there were two little broken eggs in it, which looked as though some animal had been at them.

In the garden of my cottage at Remenham, a great variety of birds can be seen in their different seasons,—robins, wagtails, chaffinches, thrushes and blackbirds, nightingales, and many others. A pair of swallows commenced a nest under the eaves of the stable, but being turned out of it by the sparrows, they took apartments in the hay-loft, which they have continued to occupy for three years; they fly in at one open door and out at another. I am never tired of watching them; the bold way they dart down and scream at the cat is very amusing, altogether disgusting the cat. They occasionally settle on the gutter edge and sing for a considerable time; their song or twitter is excessively pretty and cheerful. There are whole families of sparrows and bats in the roofs, and at night a little scratching noise above the ceilings of the bed-rooms I have set down to the bats.

Robins fly without the least noise. When I am sketching, robins come at times extremely close to me; they appear like little silent apparitions. I look up, and there is the bird perfectly motionless, regarding me with his bright dark eye; no sound of fluttering announces his coming, or his movement from spot to spot; he does everything suddenly and abruptly, with dead pauses between whiles. Even the song is an abrupt little fragment; either from alarm, or as I suspect, with the idea of driving you away, at times he will hiss out two little shrill notes. Robins have great curiosity, and are much given to recon-

noitring ; like most small garden birds, they appear pleased if they are spoken to in a friendly way.

In the branches of a pear tree against a wall in my garden, some flycatchers built their nest, just level with my eye, and I watched the whole process of incubation, the birds being very tame. One day I perceived instead of the eggs the little nest filled with a heaving fleshy mass of indistinguishable live stuff ; day by day this turned more downy, and three little beaks with gaping mouths stuck up out of it. Next I could distinguish three little speckled fledglings huddled together, and then again all at once the nest was empty, both parents and young having flown away ; the parent birds were very bold, and darted about, catching their flies all day long over the strawberry beds. The representation of this bird in Bewick does not give a very good idea of it, but his description is very exact. The flycatcher looks to me like a slim robin, with light dull grey instead of red on its breast.

Last year there was a wren's nest under the thatch of my small haystack, which was a constant source of pleasure to me, though I never succeeded in seeing the young ones ; one of the parent birds was most quaint, fidgetting about, and trying to attract my attention from its brood, its small tail cocked fiercely over its back, with an unmistakable tone of defiance in its shrill note as it eyed me fearlessly with its sharp little eye.* There are also about the garden some nice bullfinches, whose presence is soon known by their rather melancholy piping note. I have seen one very close outside my bedroom window on the verandah top, and it appeared pleased when spoken to.

* Are not all very small birds rather bold and conceited ? This is very noticeable in the bantam cock.

Lapwings are common in many reaches of the river; in the spring, many of them may be seen in the flat meadows about Greenlands, below Henley; the lapwing is an impudent sort of bird, full of quips and devices to delude its spectators. I know of nothing more reviving to the Londoner, after his smoke-begrimed winter, than the bright green meadow banks of the river on a day in spring, when the sky and water both look very blue, the marsh marigolds in blossom, and the black and white peewits playing about, enlivening the ear with their quaint cry. As your boat passes along, your eye just level with the meadows, the crested perky heads of these birds can be seen popping up all around amongst the freshly started grass.

Herons are common enough on the river; they owe their continued existence amongst us a good deal to their great cunning, as a near approach to them with anything like a gun in your hand is almost an impossibility. I have seen herons about the Brent, up the Edgware Road, and also at Ealing; they fly an enormous distance to their feeding places. At the before-mentioned flat meadows between Fawley Court and Greenlands, as also about Bolney Reach and Wargrave Marsh, you may be at any time likely to see these interesting birds. One fine bright evening in October, as I was going down Remenham Hill, a heron, closely pursued by two rooks, flew over my head; in order to keep up with the heron, the rooks had to flap their wings very quickly, a contrast to the slow motion of the wings of the larger bird; as they went on, one rook abandoned the chase, but the other kept close up, and every now and then gave dabs at the heron. I fancied I could perceive some object that hung in the air from the heron's beak, and I longed for my field-glass. I watched the birds until they were

out of sight. What object the rooks had in this pursuit I do not know. I thought possibly some large fish the heron had caught and carried off might be the temptation, or it might have been simply anger on the rooks' part. The heron took not the slightest notice of the rooks, but flew on steadily, straight for Wargrave Marsh. A heavy flood was on at the time, the rooks had been as usual feeding close to the water's edge, and there was a large flight of rooks flying home at the same time to the rookery in Park Place, but the heron and his followers were quite clear of this crowd. There are many authenticated stories of herons and rooks fighting for their nests, but this chase evidently had nothing to do with a nest dispute.

Gilbert White has repeatedly alluded to the vast flocks of swallows and martins which congregate on the eyots towards the end of September ; the number of these birds is sometimes quite astonishing. At Taplow I have seen the whole of the telegraph wires, across the railway bridge, entirely covered with them, as close as they could pack, making one feel that the weight must break down the wires, which it might do, were it not so evenly distributed. As you pass an eyot where a flock have settled, they appear suddenly filled with alarm, or an intense mania to be off, and burst into the air on every side in myriads, screaming and darting off down the river, where they generally alight again at about half-a-mile's distance ; the noise they make with their wings and screams as they go over your head, is quite deafening, and gives one a sort of feeling of being under fire in a battle.

At Wargrave, a beautiful swallow got into my bedroom, seeming ill or hurt somehow ; I caught him in my hands, but to my disgust, what I took to be a large spider, dropped out of his

feathers. I thought at first the spider had bitten the bird, but on examination it proved to be not a spider, but a most disagreeable-looking parasite of the poor bird's ; as there seemed to be others about him, I determined on giving the bird a bath, holding his head above water, and turning out the parasites into the basin with the aid of a paint-brush. There were quite thirteen or fourteen of these animals, each about the size of a pea, and somewhat like a crab in character ; on smashing them, I found they were full of blood. The bird must have been entirely weakened and prostrated by them, for it did not survive very long, though I tried to perform the operation as gently and skilfully as I possibly could. It seems very odd that these beautiful birds, so swift in flight, and strong and healthy as they look, likewise feeding themselves on insects, should yet get infected with parasites of this description ; and also strange that these wretched insects, which of themselves could only hobble about very awkwardly, should probably spend the best part of their life in whirling swiftly through the air on the bodies of their victims. Neither could I make out what prevented the swallow from ridding itself of the pests with its beak, as most of them were in places easily reached by the bird ; they were chiefly adhering underneath the wings, fixing themselves on by claws of a very effective character. Gilbert White describes these creatures, and says, the swallows' nests sometimes get so much infested with them, that they are abandoned in consequence.

Rats have ever been hateful animals to me, being associated in my mind with sewers and drains ; all the naturalists' stories of their wonderful sagacity have never reconciled me to the brutes in any way. My hatred seems to me to be somehow

connected with the length and disagreeable baldness of their tails ; any furry-tailed animal I like, but the rat's tail is most odious. My dislike does not by any means extend to water rats, their tails are shorter and less repulsive, their faces rounder, their colour richer and browner, and their general aspect by no means so unpleasant ; in their habits and mode of life too they are far cleaner. There is much also to admire in the wonderful arrangements of their burrows. The entrances to these are variously situated, some high up in the bank, some submerged beneath the water ; little tunnels being frequently cut through corners. There are some entrances up in the meadows (awkward things, by the way, to rick your ankle in when towing), through which no doubt occasionally the rats pay nocturnal visits to the crops ; these holes also serve the purposes of ventilation and escape when the river entrances are stopped by floods.

The steep clay cliffs along the river, in which rat holes abound, are my especial delight. Generally about three or four feet high, but sometimes still higher, the rat-holes in them form small subterranean grottoes and mysterious caverns and archways on their river fronts ; the swell from your boat as you tow past when close in shore, causes a pleasant reverberating sound as the water flops up into the little hollows. Some of these cliffs are, even on their steep sides, covered with all sorts of pretty miniature vegetation, the floors of the hollows carpeted with small olive golden moss, and the general decorations consisting of yellow stars of the hawkweed, with hare bells, creeping jenny, small wild geraniums, potentilla, wild strawberries, toadflax of exquisite sulphur colour, and lesser skullcap with bluish purple flowers. The ruling melodies of colour seem to run on blues and yellows, the yellow always predominant ; the flea-bane and the

fruit of the dew-berry (a sort of refined blackberry) being a very happy combination that frequently presents itself. The whole bank is like a fairy scene, and most fascinating to gaze upon from the stern of your boat as you sail or tow past close in shore. I prefer sailing slowly, as the gentle noiseless motion does not disturb the living inhabitants ; thus you may chance upon a rat chumping away at his rush root or whatever it is they feed upon. Every now and then a large chub darts into the hollow beneath the projecting ledge of clay, sometimes into a submerged rat-hole itself, an occasional dragon-fly adding life to the scene. To me the dragon-fly is the last connecting link with bygone fairy times ; the lovely blue ones and those with dark spots on the ends of their wings may pass for beneficent fairies, whilst the whirring angry brown ones represent warlike and baleful elves.

All clay cliffs on the river do not possess the same beauty ; it requires a certain happy concatenation of circumstances to produce a true fairy-like cliff garden. If the stream runs very sharply, with sudden turns and bends in the river, the cliffs are high and steep and worn into large concavities with no vegetation on, or rat-holes in them, being simply great crumbling clay banks ; examples of these are to be found at the bend at Marlow Race, and immediately below the lock at Caversham. But when the stream runs swiftly, and the banks being straight the current does not impinge on the river sides, then the cliffs do not keep altering their formation, and Nature loses no time in decorating the bank in the way I have described above. If the stream becomes sluggish, then, though the cliff may remain, osiers, rushes, willow herbs, loosestrife, and a variety of large bushy plants obtain a footing, and the miniature character of the

little cliff garden is lost. One of the prettiest of these small banks that I know is nearly opposite Temple Mills, just below Temple Lock. When punting along by a clay cliff you will be often bothered by your pole sliding suddenly from very shallow into very deep water, thus throwing you off your stroke ; it is because at these places a false shelf-like bottom is generally formed, projecting about two feet from the shore, undermined by the action of the current. This edge of clay gives way when struck by the punt-pole, which sinks to the lower bottom, often four feet deeper.

To return to our rats. As I was hugging a bank rather closely, one day, a water rat jumped out of his hole into the bow of my punt, and after running the whole length of the boat took a header off the till. When sailing, you frequently hear the chumping noise of a rat feeding amongst the rushes without seeing him, but when anchored in a backwater and quite quiet, sooner or later one or two rats are sure to make their appearance, running along the banks, up and down over the willow stumps and along their little runs, swimming when necessary, and diving beneath at the least alarm, seeking refuge no doubt by means of one of the subaqueous holes. They very much resemble in manner the otters at the Zoological Gardens, but are not quite so rapid in their motions, and more intent on business than play. You may see them at times sitting up and cleaning their faces with their forepaws in a very engaging manner.

Near houses and mills on the river, the common grey rat is often seen swimming like a water rat, and behaving much in the same manner, but he is sure to have really some connection with the drains, and does not possess a regular water burrow. I once saw one at Bisham Abbey, under the trees by the water's

edge, and recognized his hateful tail, pointed nose, and long whiskers directly.

I think I have mentioned before that I am not addicted to fishing, but, nevertheless, I am very fond of fish—not merely as food, but as interesting and beautiful objects to watch and study. When a boy I helped my brother Bradford to make a small fish-pond in our garden; he always had a great turn for any engineering undertaking of this sort, and the bottom, by his direction, had first a layer of quick-lime, to prevent the worms from boring through, and then was puddled with lumps of yellow clay, every lump of which had to be imported from a heap at a considerable distance from our house, for which purpose we made repeated journeys, carrying two lumps apiece until we had sufficient. Notwithstanding these precautions the water did not remain in the pond very long, and would not clear itself; so at last my brother had recourse to a very large tin sponging-bath, which had been laying for a long time among a lot of lumber. This made a capital floor, when pitched inside, with gravel and sand spread over it. We stocked the pond with roach, gudgeon, and perch, which we caught and brought home alive in a bait-can. This pond and its inhabitants were a constant source of pleasure to us. I remember an eel was once introduced, but the next morning we found him right at the other end of the garden, where he must have crawled. As he was not dead, we put him back; he escaped, however, again soon after, and this time the cat happened to find him, and ate half for her breakfast. I have a small fountain-pond at home, in which are gold-fish; they are very tame, and will feed out of my hand. A few years ago I had a bream in this pond, which followed me round and round, and would take my

finger right into its fat mouth ; I am sorry to say he died eventually. My fish seem always ready to feed, and take flies and bluebottles from the top of the water like trout ; they also eat worms and caterpillars, bread, or almost anything.

In my punt I am never tired of lying and looking over the side down into the water, watching the fish. The top of the water, if your boat is still, soon swarms with little wee mites of fry, especially if a few crumbs are scattered occasionally. After a bit, larger ones begin to appear ; they are, I believe, near at hand all the time, but much deeper down. Large fish are far shyer than small ones ; whether this proceeds from experience, or from more developed vision, I cannot say ; but if you persevere in crumb-throwing, the larger ones become much bolder. The rapidity with which little fish see anything the instant it touches the water, is astonishing, and the rush they make at everything that floats down to them is very amusing. These little fish will follow, or rather precede the punt, if it is merely drifting, for a long way, apparently regardless of where they are going. Now and then, as you pass over a deep place, one of those scatters occurs which take place when perch are on the feed : I have seen two of these bold fish pursue their prey right under my punt. I distinguished their erect back-fins and striped sides plainly, as they swam away disconcerted at missing the little baits. I have also seen great jack lying like logs at the bottom ; their only movement being an occasional roll of their goggle eyes, which are quite on the upper side of their head. I have tried to spear them with the punt-pole, but never with any effect that I could discover ; but I saw Dick Andrews, the fisherman, spear one with his pole, and we picked it up the next day with two great holes in its side ; it was a fine fish of four

or five pounds weight. In shallow gravelly water, when the sun shines, hundreds of gudgeon may be seen feeding on the bottom ; they roll their eyes every now and then, something after the manner the jack do. I suppose this is a peculiarity of fish whose eyes are rather in the backs of their heads ; probably barbel would do the same. I never saw perch or roach or gold-fish do this. Gudgeon also every now and then flick over on their sides, apparently in play. Barbel play and feed very much in the same way as gudgeon. I watched two or three from the horse-bridge below Marsh Lock ; they behaved extremely like gudgeon. These fish grow very large in some of the deep reaches ; they have a way of jumping clean out of the water, I suppose in play, the noise they make being quite startling.

I see a great number of chub when punting ; this fish haunts the edges of the river, feeding on the grubs and flies and whatever gets blown into the water. They are easily recognized by their dark tails and grey bodies ; they most frequently make for their hiding places in the banks when disturbed, and do not dart off for the centre of the river like roach and perch. At Dorchester the little river Thame ran through the garden of the house I stayed at, and in a pool beneath an elm tree a large shoal of chub could often be seen on a fine day, basking in the sun. I managed to get quite close to them behind the elm tree and caught several ; chub are very poor fish for the table.

There are still a good many trout in the Thames, and those that are caught are generally of large size. At Monkey Island I have seen many beneath the willows ; I managed to get close enough to them to see their spots. Below the weir at

Hambledon I have frequently seen them rising and darting over the shallows and eddies. Walker was most eager and anxious to catch one, and tried over and over again when I was with him, without success ; he fished with a fly, but Thames trout are far oftener caught spinning with minnows or bleak. Mr. Hodgson informed me that Walker did succeed in catching a fine trout with a fly, between Bray and Monkey Island ; he had this success on the last visit he paid the river.

There are two fine trout stuffed, in glass cases, in the parlour of the "Complete Angler" at Marlow ; one a very comic ugly-looking fellow, not unlike a jack about the head. He was caught at the Quarry Woods in 1877. I saw two or three hundred fine young trout put into the river just below the weir at Marlow. They came from the stream at Wycombe, in a large tank ; the fisherman thought that very few would escape the jack. The little brook at Ewelme had many trout in it ; at Fyfield House, where the brook was canalized, and ran with small falls in it, through the lawn, some very fine trout could be seen which were comparatively tame. I think a garden nicely kept, with a small clear brook running through it, as near perfection in the way of garden pleasures as anything in the world. There was another little cottage, with a garden through which the Ewelme brook ran, as pretty as anything that could be imagined, and here, when young, the late Bishop of Exeter once lived.

The bending of the stream makes a shoal of small fish as they come up against it take the same beautiful curves and lines as the wracks and weeds do ; the smallest fish head the procession, and the larger ones come in afterwards. From a low bridge they are delightful to watch ; when they arrive in

the slack water the beautiful curved formation is lost, and they spread about in every direction. Young fish of all sorts like the shallow gravelly edges of a river, assembling there in thousands, making the water quite alive with their gambols. They like these places because here the sun warms the water quickly, small flies and insects abound, and they enjoy a comparative immunity from jack and perch, though I have seen a raid carried right up into the shallows, the track of the destroyer being plainly traced by the huge wake raised after him. I have sometimes disturbed large chub or roach basking along with the small fry, but I suspect these were fish that had been injured or were unwell in some way.

The little coteries of small, black water-beetles, which in a sheltered place are seen dancing about, in and out, and round and round, are very amusing to watch ; is it love or play or merely exercise ? I am told the velocity with which these beetles move is a source of wonder even to beetle students, as the beetles only have but a small pair of paddles. Water snails are well known to aquarium keepers ; the millions there must be in the river can be judged of by getting up any flint or chalk stone from the bottom, the sides of which are sure to have some small ones adhering to it. There is one sort of floating snail, something like a whelk in shape, that swims just beneath the surface of the water, and feeds on floating débris. These floating snails are very curious ; they differ from the ordinary water snails in the fact that they breathe air, and the most extraordinary thing about them is that they can walk on the under surface of the water like a fly does on the ceiling. On the external surface of the water, immediately over their expanded foot, a slight dimple or depression in the water can

be seen, but how progression is accomplished puzzles still even the most learned. Freshwater mussels are very numerous ; their empty shells can be picked up in great quantities on the shores of backwaters. The mussel is a nasty thing to tread on when bathing, being very hard and sharp.

Water weeds vary in their growth much more than land plants, owing to the different circumstances around them ; thus persicaria, when the water is shallow, will grow right up out of it, with leaves that are willow shape, and stalks strong, green and branching ; when in calm water, 8 or 10 feet deep, it sends up long straight stalks, with pretty elliptical leaves of a reddish tinge and of perfectly aquatic character, the small coral spike of bloom sticking up like the end of a float ; in strong running water it hardly ever reaches the surface, but struggles out with ragged weedy growth, the leaves being of the same shape as when the plant is land-grown, but so disfigured with slimy vegetation on their surface as hardly to be recognized ; indeed the weed can only be distinguished as persicaria by the seed spikes and abortive attempts at flowering which it makes beneath the water. Arrow-heads behave in much the same way ; in calm places, if not too deep, they rise boldly out of the water, and throw out their beautiful flowers and picturesque leaves ; in deeper waters they send up long ribbon-shaped leaves which seldom reach the top, and in a swift stream they run out in long streaming pennants, which, if examined, will be found to have very often branching ends to them and divisions, evidently struggling to take the arrow-head shape. These ribbons are easily recognized as true leaves, as each has its own distinct stalk to it, which prevents them from being taken for long wracks or rushes. If by chance any obstruction to the

stream occurs that the plant can avail itself of, it loses no time in throwing up a head of blossom.

Water-crowfoot is another of these adaptable plants; it has two distinct sorts of leaves, one in calm water lies on the surface and is of a pretty round character, something like the shape of an ace of clubs; the submerged leaves resemble those of fennel or asparagus. If growing where the stream is strong the long pale stalks flow out for yards and yards and form themselves into tangled masses, sometimes quite impeding the current, and from these the persistent little white blossoms crop up wherever they get a chance. Vast quantities of these masses of crowfoot get collected round the piers of bridges and mill gratings in May and June, and even in this condition they still keep flowering as well as they can. In a pond water-crowfoot will entirely cover the water, the white blossom being so thickly spread that at a distance it looks like snow. Water-lilies are also troubled, but not overcome by the stream. Few people know what immense numbers of the common yellow sort are growing in the bed of the river which never come to the top at all, but remain below all rumpled, dirty, and grown over with small vegetation. I have heard them called by young people water cabbages, and really it is not a bad name, for sometimes the ground is so thickly planted with them that it is as though the river was flowing over a field of cabbages. One dirty little yellow bud with long attenuated stalk manages here and there to come up and ripen a head of seed under the protection of a stray rush or two, but there must be whole acres of these plants in the river which on account of the stream never rise to the surface at all. Whenever the water is drawn off for the purposes of doing something to the weirs or locks, the uncovered

banks are seen, and the poor flabby grey water-lilies look ugly and helpless to the last degree ; a great quantity of all sorts of weeds are then exposed, and no doubt the fall in the water must be a very serious crisis to a mass of the animals and vegetables.

There is one sort of animal life on the river, which I think everybody will agree with me in disliking, namely the gnats and midges. The countless myriads of small midges are the most astonishing ; when my wife and I were at Marlow we dared not open the windows after lights were lit, lest the midges should have made the room unendurable. I got however a good deal of amusement out of them in this wise : outside our window, across a pane of glass, a spider had made its web, and every night reaped a fine harvest of small fry, but one night I amused myself by looking at the insect with a magnifier, and held a candle close up to the glass opposite its web. The small flies rushed in furiously at the light, and in a short time the web was so full, that it hung heavy with the load ; the spider was quite equal to the occasion, and danced about like a mad thing. A great many she (web spiders are females) caught in her mouth direct, as they flew right at her, and at last, as the web began to break, she pulled all she could collect together, made a sort of bag of the lot, and ate them like potted shrimps in one mass. I focussed the light right on to the body of the spider, by means of the magnifier, and when thus glorified, the gnats, moths, and midges went at her with renewed energy, so much so, that at last she took her bundle off, and retired for the night in her corner. It was most droll to see the spider through the magnifier, darting after the midges in the web, sometimes one or two held in her mouth like cigarettes.

There is another curious little water animal that I have not mentioned, and that is the fresh-water crawfish ; you will often see them in the wells of the fishermen's punts, where they eat up the dead bait. They are very comic little things, small fresh-water lobsters, and when touched they spring off backwards. I am very sorry to say, that owing to their dirty habits of feeding, I have not studied them very much, for I was told that any number might be caught in hand nets where a dead dog was floating ; the nets are put down in the water near the carrion, and on giving it a blow, the crawfish underneath jump backwards into them. I believe these creatures are not the same as those of which they make soup, but may possibly be substituted for the real article in days of scarcity. At Shillingford, I had a long account of the art of crawfish-tail fishing for chub, from a clever fisherman named Turner of Dorchester, but as I am not an angler, the yarn was lost on me.

Wasps are well known on the Thames ; some years, as in '79, they were very scarce, but this year, '80, they are making up for lost time, and flock in thousands everywhere. They follow a boat for a long while in the most persistent manner, the way they scent your lunch on board being truly marvellous. Spirits of ammonia or hartshorn is an instant cure for their sting, and should always be taken with you on a picnic or boating expedition. I destroyed two wasps' nests in our field this summer, having waited until it was nearly dark, when all the wasps had returned home ; then, inserting the neck of a champagne bottle, the bottom of which had been broken off, into the entrance hole, through this sort of funnel I poured down paraffine, which entirely settled the whole swarm. I dug up the nests a day or two afterwards, and each consisted of three flakes of whit



brown comb about the size of muffins or crumpets ; the mother wasp, considerably larger than the ordinary ones, was discovered in each nest, and a number of grubs and unhatched eggs in their cells ; already the minute larvæ of some sort of fly had commenced feeding on the dead wasps and grubs, and so nothing was wasted.

At the end of the summer, the surface of the river is on a fine evening covered by millions of winged insects, which are to appearance something between a gnat and a moth ; they fly just above the water backwards and forwards. If you keep your eye on those flying from right to left, the ones that cross them from the other direction seem to dart past much quicker, but if you watch these last, the former ones seem the quickest ; this of course is an optical delusion. It is amusing to notice how a number of these insects will accompany a boat, keeping just a little way ahead. On an evening walk, a swarm of small gnats will do the same thing, only in this case they fly just over your head. The river flies must have wonderful strength, for they never seem to stop for rest ; they appear too, quite reckless of the danger of the proximity of the water, indeed, every now and then one gets snapped up by the chub. If the evening sun shines across the water, the millions of flies over the surface become illumined, and present the appearance of a golden haze.

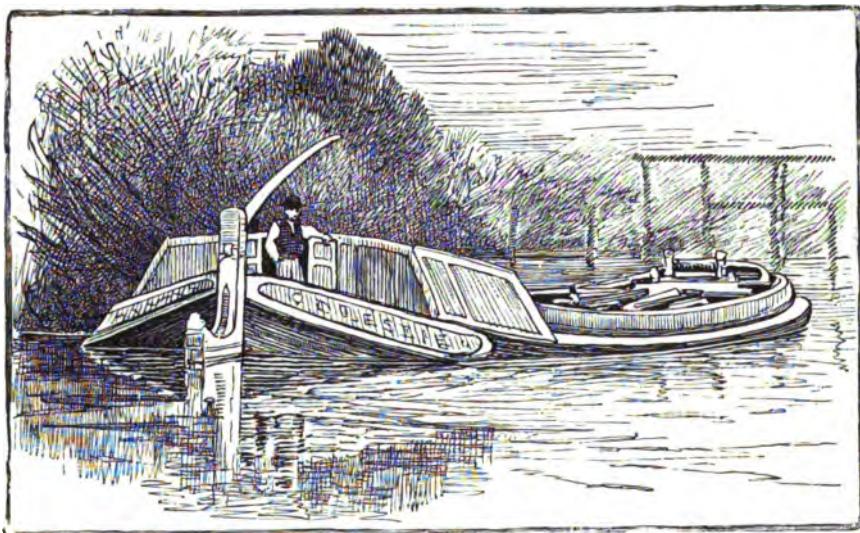
One afternoon, when taking tea with my wife and children in the Quarry Woods at Marlow, I noticed a curious thing about bees, at least the large wild bees ; we boiled our kettle by means of a small lamp, which burnt methylated spirits, and around this lamp and kettle the bees kept hovering, coming from every quarter. I could not make out whether it was the

smell of the spirits burning, or the warmth which attracted them ; now and then one would burn its feet on attempting to alight on the kettle, flying away directly, apparently disillusioned. My nephew told me that at the seaside he had noticed a number of large wild bees, flying about over the seaweed on the rocks at low tide, and he could by no means find out what they were after. In F. Walker's garden at St. Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, there was a very large colony of stray bees, which had taken up their abode in an old forsaken flue chimney in the garden wall ; he supplied them with little pans of water, and they came down to drink continually. The chimney was no doubt full of honey, and as there was plenty of room in it, the bees never swarmed ; it was evidently a very large swarm, because of the length of time in the evening during which the bees kept returning to their nest.

In our garden at Henley this summer, I was very much amused by watching a wagtail feed its young. There was only one young one, and the little thing ran about on the grass, with its wing quivering, after its mother, who was very active in supplying its wants. A large moth was caught by the mother, but until she had completely disabled it, she would not give it to her young one. The manner in which she battled with the moth was very exciting, as it eluded her several times ; it reminded me strongly of a cat with a mouse.

I find I have forgotten to mention a remarkable instance of the vitality of the jack. Mrs. Copeland in the winter once sent me a couple of fine young jack packed in grass in a hamper. They had been caught the day before I had received them, having travelled by the Great Western Railway, and when I opened the hamper I noticed the gills of one

moved slightly, so I placed him in a tub of clean water; in about half an hour he was so lively that it was quite difficult to hold him, and he had to be killed afresh. Young jack, fresh from the Thames, are exceedingly good to eat in the winter time; their flesh is creamy and yellow, and the bones give very little trouble.



A Thames Barge.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLOWERS AND WEEDS ON THE RIVER.—BANK DECORATION.—GENERAL ARRANGEMENT.—A TYPICAL THAMES BANK DESCRIBED.—WILLOW-HERB AND LOOSE-STRIFE.—MEADOW-SWEET.—THE DEW-BERRY AND FLEA-BANE.—THE SMALLER PLANTS.—FROGBIT.—VILLARSIA.—BLADDER-WORT.—FLOWERING-RUSH.—RIVER SCENTS.—SWEET SEDGES.—WEEDS AT WEIRS.—THE WEIR POOLS.—BEAUTY IN NATURE.—TENDENCY OF ALL THINGS TO GROW BEAUTIFUL.—AMATEURS.—J. BRETT, A.R.A.—TURNER.—CLEARNESS OF THE WATER AFTER A NORTH WIND.—DESCRIPTION OF THE RIVER BOTTOM.—SUBMERGED PLANTS.—CHANGES OF COLOUR IN FISH.—BRANDY-AND-WATER CURE FOR A SICK FISH.—MISTLETOE.—TEASLES.—MARSH MARI-GOLDS.—GARDENERS' GARDENING.—COTTAGE GARDENS.—CLIPPED HEDGES.—PERMANENT PLEASURES.



VEN if I had sufficient knowledge of the subject I think it would be unnecessary for me to give my readers anything like a systematic description of the various river plants, as there are so many admirable handbooks of Botany available for those who may wish to make the subject a serious study. I propose rather to write, from the artistic point of view, about the beauty and the

arrangement one with another of the most remarkable bank and river flowers that usually strike the eye of the boat traveller.

In number of species, the plants with yellow blossoms greatly preponderate, but in the summer months the most influential masses of colour are given to the banks by the purplish pink flowers of two plants, the willow herb, and the long purple loose-strife. In mass effect, the yellow flowers certainly come next, whilst the white ones, such as meadow-sweet, white comfrey, milfoil and a number of umbelliferous weeds, assert themselves in a gentler way. Plants with purple and blue flowers, growing mostly in a snugger manner, have not much effect on the general tones of the banks; the chief of these are the purple comfrey, woody nightshade, meadow crane's bill, lesser skull-cap, cat-mint, hare-bells, and forget-me-nots, which latter, however, on flat, muddy banks sometimes afford large masses of light, bright blue. There is also a number of water plants, whose blossom and seeds have great influence on the general effect, though their colours are neutral and nondescript; of these the hemp agrimony, thistles in seed-time, water figworts, and docks are the most remarkable. On the river itself the water crowfoot in spring-time, with favourable weather, will sometimes cover large patches with its bright white flowers, and water-lilies, frog-bit, villarsia and arrow-heads all do much towards ornamenting the surface in different parts. In the matter of green things of different shades, we find the reeds, flags when out of bloom, round rushes, and reed-mace of the cooler tones, and the sedges, sweet sedges, and bur-reeds of a richer and warmer colour.

The following may be taken as a pretty accurate description of an ordinary Thames bank on the tow-path side, about the end of July. The bank itself is a small clay cliff of about four or five feet high, on a gravel and chalk foundation; it is of course penetrated in every direction with rat holes; here and there a

dwarf shrubby growth of alder or willow projects from its front, occasionally growing high enough to prove troublesome to the tow-line. By these bushes a few flags or reeds find a corner for themselves; from the bank itself, about a foot from the water, the purple loose-strife springs up, its long heads of blossom rising well above the bank, and close beside it the still taller willow-herb is seen, a bushy growth of four or five feet in height. The flowers of these two plants are beautifully contrasted; those of the loose-strife are more purple in colour, and grow most gracefully in long upright whorls. If one of the spikes of flowers gets broken or bent, it curls round and immediately resumes its upward growth. The tall long blossoms of this plant are just a trifle too sad and solemn in their effect on the mind; and the counteracting influence of the bright spangling pink blossoms of the willow-herb, with its light green foliage, at once rectifies this feeling. There will be, in nine cases out of ten, a St. John's wort growing in close proximity to these two plants; the rich yellow flowers in exquisite harmony with the purple stalks and heads of the loose-strife. As if to give value to the rather dark rich yellow of the St. John's wort, near it and the purple loose-strife there is frequently seen a head of yellow loose-strife, with pure bright yellow flowers. This plant is very often at first sight mistaken for St. John's wort; it is no relation to the purple loose-strife, and belongs in reality to the primrose family.

More snugly situated on the bank, and close to the water's edge, the large sage-like leaves of the comfrey, covered with prickly down, and of very handsome growth, are seen; their graceful stems and heads of bloom curling over, the flowers of dull purple or creamy-white drooping down towards the water as they expand. The spaces of bank about this part,

clear of larger growths, will most likely have numbers of seedling willow-herbs and loose-strife sprouting up ; and if the larger plants hold off for any considerable distance, the decoration of the bank is continued on a smaller scale by the light green leaves and dark blue fruit of the dewberry. This is of the bramble tribe, and I have noticed it growing on the banks of the river very generally ; the contrast in colour between its dark berries, which look like minute bunches of purple grapes, and the yellow heads of the flea-bane, gives me almost as much pleasure as anything on the river. There is something about the quality of the colour of the flea-bane, derived from its dense dull yellow centre, which, together with the musk-like look of its foliage, seems to harmonize so perfectly with the rich blue-purple fruit. I was reminded of this contrast in a fine portrait of a naval officer by Reynolds, in which the gold lace and blue uniform had, in a relative manner, precisely the same happy effect.

Creeping about the upper parts of the cliff, small potentillas, wild strawberry plants, and bird's-foot trefoil, add variety, and the yellow and blue harmony is taken up in a different key by hare-bells and hawkweeds. On the edges of the bank, the little yellow bedstraw, an occasional poppy, a scabious or two, and the quaint upright toad-flax, are most likely to be found. Toad-flax, which is a small spurred snapdragon, has just the same value in its yellow as the cowslip, pale sulphur and orange mixed—butter and eggs as it is called by country children sometimes. A stunted bush of alder, much worn off on its top by tow-lines, is likely to come next ; amongst it the woody night-shade is found trailing and climbing about, and underneath, on the shelving bank, the lesser skull-cap, and then more comfrey

and loose-strife, with sprays of meadow-sweet * (the wild spiraea), which I had almost forgotten. This lovely scented flower does not grow in masses, but mingles in here and there amongst the other plants, adapting its height and growth to its company with nature-born politeness ; its white is warm and slightly greenish, exactly like the tone of elder blossom. The small yarrow or milfoil affords here and there a more pure, and, at times, a pinky white ; and there are several graceful umbelliferous plants which grow along the banks. Down by the water's edge the stout square-stemmed water-figwort is likely to be noticed ; it has little dark chocolate flowers, very curious to look into, but not of great beauty. Beside it grows, most probably, a tall clump of docks, with large luxuriant leaves, beloved of landscape artists, and great heads of flowers and seeds of rusty colour, these latter being most unpleasant to run the nose of the punt against in autumn, as they come pattering into the boat, and are very difficult to get rid of. The dock has not much colour in its flowers to recommend it, but the leaves turn to the most brilliant crimson and orange-lake colours, and are very fine and grand in their almost tropical forms. In the autumn all these large plants have great effect on the general aspect of the banks ; the rusty tops of the docks and coppery tones of the bur-reeds harmonizing wonderfully well with the dark cool green of the rushes and reeds.

A person to whom wild flowers are a novelty is sure to exclaim with delight at the sight of the meadow crane's-bill, a not very common plant on the banks ; but here and there one of its large, showy, mauve-coloured flowers is sure to be met

* How much more beautiful in form and variety are the heads of meadow-sweet bloom than the spiraea's spikes of flowers !

with. There are plenty of plants of its humbler, but not less beautiful cousin, the wild geranium, or "Herb Robert;" the pretty little pink flowers, and elegant reddish foliage of which frequently adorn the portions of the banks allotted to the smaller plants. An occasional ox-eye daisy, and bunches of wild mustard, rather run to seed, are also seen mixed in with the August flowers; and when I have mentioned that sloes and hawthorns are likely to occur as stunted bushes, as well as alders and willows, and that the amphibious persicaria is everywhere found filling up the edges of the banks, I think the description of the omnium gatherum of one of these Thames cliffs may be said to be complete.

As the cliff loses its upright character and shelves down in easier slope, the banks become softer, sweet sedges and bur-reeds* jut out into the water, whilst on the flat edges and muddy slopes beds of forget-me-nots are most likely to be found. If the rushes, feather reeds, and sedges project far into the water, forming a small bay, the water-lilies at once take advantage of the calm, and spread out over the surface; water plantains and arrow-heads also sprout up around the edges. Sometimes, instead of the water-lilies, persicaria assumes the dominion, and in its pure aquatic state is very beautiful, with small elliptical floating leaves of a purplish hue, and short spikes of bright coral-like flower-heads. The other floating aquatics, frog-bits, and villarsia will hardly ever be found on the tow-path side; being so tender they would easily get swept away by the traffic. They can both be found, however, in other very slack waters, or sheltered places away from the main stream. The frog-bit is a very interesting little floating

* The bur-reed is represented in the initial to this Chapter.

plant, entirely independent of the river bottom, each little cluster of leaves and flower having its small roots hanging beneath it in the water; the leaves are just like miniature water-lily leaves, and the flowers are small delicate white ones with three petals. I took a lot of these curious plants home with me, and placed them in a pond in my garden; they did very well and performed their winter hibernation safely, the whole plant sinking to the bottom after it had done flowering, and remaining in the mud during the winter. It was with great delight that I saw the minute leaves rise to the surface the following year, and bloom again in the summer. *Villarsia* is more difficult to transplant, as its roots are at the bottom of the river, deep in the mud, its long stalks being likewise very fragile. It can be got up however with care, and is with the frog-bit eminently suited for the decoration of a small garden pond or fountain; the leaves of *villarsia* are also very like those of the water-lily, but have slight points round the edges, and are a little larger than those of the frog-bit; the flower is a pretty fringed bright yellow one, raised about two inches out of the water, and about the size of a primrose. In the ditches that run out of the river, separating the flat meadows one from another, all the river wild flowers are found in profuse luxuriance; better specimens being there seen, as they do not get so much knocking about. Such ditches occur in the meadows below Temple Lock, near Marlow, on the tow-path side, and between that place and Hurley, or indeed anywhere, if the meadows run low and flat. In these ditches, the frog-bits, *villarsia*, and bladder-wort abound. The bladder-wort is so called from the little air sacs that float up the leaves and stems during the flowering season, after which the air escapes from them, and the plant sinks into the mud for the winter, like

the frog-bit ; the flowers are singular-looking little yellow ones, three or four on a stalk, raised upright out of the water, the leaves and little bladders being beneath. In these ditches the extremely beautiful flowering rush can often be met with, most Japanese in its beauty, and well worth transplanting for the adornment of any piece of water a garden may be happy enough to possess ; the flowers grow in a head or umbel, and are trefoil in their petals, like the irises. They are of the most delicate brownish pink colour, with the outsides of much darker shade, whilst within, the stamens are of brighter red ; when picked and taken home, every bud will bloom, if the flower is placed in water, and it will last for nearly a fortnight. There are many strong-smelling flowers on the river, which one notices in passing, such as the lovely meadow-sweet, so well known and universally liked, and the peppermint, or catmint, which though very prevalent is not quite so universally popular. To me all the natural smells of the river are agreeable, partly, perhaps, from their associations with happy days ; even the muddy odour is not to me repulsive. I like the scent of the osier bark very much, and the smell of a newly made hamper, as I have before mentioned, gives me pleasure. But the most remarkable of all river scents is found on a hot day when you rub your boat against a bank of sweet sedges ; these plants give out an aromatic odour not unlike that of cinnamon, which is most balmy and delicious ; throwing out a curious spike of bloom, or fruit, I know not which, from their side ; the colour of the leaves is a warmer green than that of the flags or bulrushes. It was these sweet sedges that were gathered to strew the floors of halls in olden time, and not the common rushes ; the scent they gave out when trodden on, no doubt filling the chambers in a

delightful manner. In my description of the bank flowers I have omitted to mention the large bushy hemp agrimony, a tall dull-looking plant, of about four feet high, growing amongst the willow herbs and loose-strifes, its large clusters of downy pinkish flowers, though of very neutral tint, affording fine masses in the general landscape, and along with the seed-heads of the plume thistles, tempering the general brilliancy with sober tones. This plant is no connexion at all of the little yellow agrimony, which also appears sometimes along the banks, with small yellow flowers on a slender upright stem, not unlike a miniature mullein.

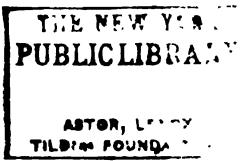
In the rough waste ground about a weir there are several large-leaved rapidly growing weeds which very quickly in the summer cover and decorate in grand style the rugged chalk boulder and gravel in the interstices of the lumps of concrete and pile heads. On the weirs themselves coarse sedges and rank grass soon spring up. Huge butter-burs, docks and burdocks, are generally seen around a weir pool, the boldness of the water display demanding largeness of style in its ornamentation. A few of the larger bank flowers, however, find a place here too, the purple loose-strife starting out sometimes between old timbers. I remember seeing on the sides of an old lasher a dandelion plant growing so luxuriantly and gracefully that it made me think at first that it must be some larger species of the well-known plant. On the posts and pile heads right over which the water falls, when the river is low and ceases to flow over the weir, you will find huge lumps of spongy green moss, soft and beautiful to the touch. On occasions when repairs are going on, and the sluices are drawn, I am much interested in exploring the weir-

pools ; all the troubled swirl of waters is then still and calm, and tranquillity reigns for a time over the whole place. By the edges of the fall may be seen, away down in the water, great broken masses of wooden planking and pile heads, with large bolts and rusty clamping irons sticking out from their sides, a respect of which hidden dangers has caused me to avoid weirs and lashers as bathing places. The depth of the pools varies very much, 30 feet or more in some places, rapidly shelving up to quite a shallow, or even to beds of stones whose tops are above the surface. Across the deep holes punting becomes impossible, but by using the pole as a sort of paddle the depth is soon passed over. There is an amusing trick to be performed here with the pole ; it is done by holding it perpendicularly over the water, and then suddenly darting it to the bottom, it goes right down out of sight, but in a second or two according to the depth, rises again still perpendicular, like a quill float, out of the water close to your hand, and can be taken hold of with the utmost ease ; to those who have never seen this simple trick it appears very marvellous. When the weir is running in full force it is not very easy to navigate a punt in the pool, but with a thorough knowledge of the eddies and various depths, it can be safely managed, especially if the pole is long and strong.

The small islands of thrown-up gravel and sand which occur so frequently at the shallow ends of a weir-pool, are in the summer months rapidly clothed with grass, sedges, and even forget-me-nots ; they form very favourite resorts of swans and their young ones. Here they come ashore to trim their feathers, the fallen ones of which strew the grass. Swans are supposed by most people to be ungraceful when ashore, but I never think so ; the silhouette of a swan when the sun is low and the bird



Entrance to the Backwater, Bolney Reach.



appears in tone against the golden flashing waters running by the side of one of these shingly islands, being about as grand in line as anything I ever saw, and a landed swan is a far more appropriate and true bird to introduce in such a scene than the conventional curly-necked heron of the common landscape painter.

The universality of beauty in nature must ever remain a problem of the greatest mystery to a reflective mind; that the vast superfluity of beauty which prevails on every side has been perfected solely for the delight and recreation of human beings, must appear an absurd idea, if we consider how very few of us there are, capable of appreciating this beauty even in a small degree. This book of nature is written in a language of its own; it requires a genius to master its secrets, and translate and arrange them so as to become evident to lesser capacities, but whether appreciated or not, all created things have a tendency to grow beautiful. It is easy enough to trace out the various causes that influence the shapes and colours of objects; the prevailing winds, the set of the stream, the nature of the soil, and hundreds of other contingencies are at work shaping and altering everything into an harmonious whole, but the mystery is, why should it be an harmonious and beautiful whole? Any one can reason out why water reflects perpendicular lines more readily than others, and also why plants on a river bank have mostly a tendency to grow in an upright perpendicular manner, but why exquisite beauty is the result of these circumstances is much more difficult of explanation. Again, how is it that a willow bush on one side of a river shapes and colours itself so as to be in harmony with others on the opposite bank? The winter floods, the bend in the river, or the wind, may have had a hand in the work, but why

is the result beautiful? Amongst the beauties of nature the disturbing influence of the hand of man is quickly recognized by an educated eye; a newly-built house, no matter how clever its architect may be, always displeases by its obtrusion; trees have been displaced to make room for it, the contours of all the surrounding trees are thus suddenly deprived of their proper balance, the colour too of the intruder is sadly out of key, even if its shape and outline be ever so cunningly designed; but leave it alone, in a very few years, "when them creepers has grown up," as the builder says, the colour becomes right, the trees accommodate their outlines to the new comer, and if the building has any art at all in it, so far from being an eyesore it becomes not only beautiful, but has also the advantages of the human interest attached to it. The harder and more imperishable the material employed by man, the longer will it take nature to recover the lost beauty; where great piles of slate, brick, and iron arise, as in the huge manufacturing districts, little short of total destruction and hundreds of years of repose would be necessary before Nature could re-clothe the spot with tender harmony. I have been led to these reflections by having lately observed how very rapidly a new weir or lock becomes picturesque and beautiful; it is true the agents at work are powerful—large flourishing bushes, tall grass, and mosses, aided by the rushing waters with their spray, and a few weeks' hot sun, soon do wonders for the place. There is something also to be admired in the human work as well, if carried out in stone or wood, a sense of its resisting strength and permanency contrasting well with the wild dash of the falling stream; it is only when iron is largely used in the construction that ugliness results. An iron wheel or bolt is all very well, but when thin iron posts and

girders span the river where it rushes in its strength, a hideous incongruity is the result, which Nature seems to shrink from adorning in any way.

All waste places that man does not want or bother himself about, are composed and arranged in most perfect harmony; the river banks in general get very little interference with them, and in consequence are most charming studies of true arrangement, the most beautiful being always those that have been left undisturbed the longest. In the growth of trees and bushes, what a wonderful thing it is that almost every leaf takes its line and has reference to the lines and composition of every other leaf on the plant, the whole tree being like a well-disciplined army, every single soldier of which is in accord with the ruling ideas of its leader. My favourite willow, elsewhere mentioned, is a beautiful example in this respect; not only does every large branch with its clump of foliage harmonise with the whole bush, as that does with the surrounding landscape, but also each little coterie of leaves and twigs grows with the same unity of purpose and design; the colouring, too, is put on everywhere with perfect rightness, the minute leaves at the end of the young golden shoots having entrusted to them the important duty of lighting up and warming the whole with flecks of orange, red, and gold, the light grey undersides of other leaves showing exactly where they are wanted, and the olive green of the top sides giving the prevailing tone to the whole. And what could be possibly devised to go so well with these charming bushes as clumps of the tall reed-mace or feathery reeds of an entirely different coloured green and entirely different character of growth! And then how much the whole is helped by the reflections, repeating the composition in a gently subdued manner,

like a beautiful refrain in fine music! Even this is not all, for lest the perpendicular lines of the reeds and their reflections should have too much influence, the horizontal spread of a few water-lily leaves over the surface is introduced, restoring the balance, and at the same time affording a perspective effect by which the eye can judge the distances. In tracing out and studying the various harmonies and contrasts of nature, I find a never-failing source of pleasure and delight; even alone in my boat I can interest myself for hours in this occupation. I prefer it to sketching itself, because in endeavouring to reproduce the perfection of nature I am perpetually being mortified at my shortcomings, and as the scene keeps changing with the hour, fresh beauties crowd upon me before I have half recorded the first impressions. I have generally observed that the most industrious and enthusiastic sketchers from nature are amateurs; they are most eager for their work. Choosing the most difficult and intricate subjects, and sitting down in the most uncomfortable places, they dab away with an energy worthy of a better recompense. A young professional is nearly as enthusiastic, but when I see an old one working perpetually and patiently in the open air, a shrewd suspicion crosses my mind that he can only be but a second-rate performer. A true artist really never stops working at all. But it is not always done with brushes and colours—the education of his eye is his constant business, the education of his hand has generally been achieved very early in life; if you find such an one painting out-of-doors, it will most likely be found that he is making a careful study of some detail or other. What always amuses me in the amateur sketcher's work is its utterly conventional look, and the little resemblance it bears to the scene represented; it is done exactly as the

drawing master has taught, and for all intents and purposes might have been painted at home from one of the drawings lent to copy. Amongst the thousands of landscapes that yearly pass before the selecting committees at the Royal Academy and the Dudley Gallery, it is marvellous how those in which nature has been faithfully studied are recognized in a moment by any artist conversant with the difference between the tricks of the studio and the real aspect of nature.

As an instance of intense study of the truths of nature, I trust my friend Mr. Brett will pardon me if I mention his picture of the “Cornish Lions,” exhibited in 1878. There are waves curling and breaking on the beach in that picture as true in drawing and colouring as it is possible for any one to desire; so true are they that one feels it must have been painted on the spot direct from nature. This we know from the very nature of the subject would be impossible, and it is in reality to the long and patient study, and the powerful and retentive brain of the accomplished artist that we owe this lovely record of the seashore. How different is this method of work from that of the portrait painter, with his subject lit by the steady north light of his studio at the same hour every day for fourteen or if need be thirty sittings. I have heard Mr. Brett’s works described by critics as simply patient transcripts from nature; for my part I never feel the want of poetic imagination in them, and I greatly reverence his powers of thus transcribing; in any case the results are good likenesses of the scenes depicted, a success which the portrait painter does not always achieve with his sitters.

My father used to relate a story about Turner when he was staying at Petworth, which has some bearing on the subject of

the study of nature. Turner and Sir Francis Chantrey started out for some fishing together ; after a short time they separated, and Turner was left by Chantrey seated at the water's edge. On Chantrey's return with his basket well filled with fish, he found Turner still seated at the spot where he had left him, and he teased him about his laziness. Turner in reply asked him if he knew the difference between the rings made by a fish rising and those which occur when anything falls in the water. This he had been studying all the time by watching the fish, and occasionally throwing little stones into the water. I believe most fishermen could tell whether the rings were made by a fish or a stone, but Turner's hour had been spent in acquiring a deeper knowledge than that, for no doubt he had mastered the forms so thoroughly that he could have rendered them accurately on canvas.

Nature takes kindly to bricks and mortar ; most old walls are rich in their varied decoration, but when near water the beautifying process is increased tenfold. On the fine old brickwork which embanks the gardens of Phillis Court as many as thirty or forty different species of wild plants may be found, not the least beautiful of which is the small ivy-leaved toadflax, with its quaint little lilac blossom. It seems a pity that this example of embanking a Thames lawn with brickwork is not oftener imitated instead of adopting the wooden campshed ; the expense may be greater in the first instance, but in the end a great saving must be the result, as the campshed very soon gets out of repair.

There is one family of beautiful plants that are conspicuous on the river by their absence—I mean the ferns. The constant aberrations which the river is liable to in its rise and fall have a

good deal to do with this ; the sort of soil required by ferns would inevitably get washed away in the winter floods. The character of the geological formations through which the Thames flows likewise precludes the heaths from its banks ; it is in no sense a mountain stream, but a steady useful domesticated river, with calm navigable beauties quite peculiar to it. Scotchmen and Alpine tourists are often a little apt to despise its tame beauties, but no mountain torrent in Scotland or Wales, however wild and picturesque, can boast of such miles of flowery banks, or tranquil lily-spread calms, as are found on the Berks and Oxford shores.

The clearness of the water has of late years been much spoilt by the launches, and sewage, and strict enforcement of the legislation with regard to these two nuisances is much needed ; but even now, after a spell of fine weather in the autumn, if a sudden fall in the temperature takes place, with a dry north wind, the water gets most beautifully clear, and the river in deep places assumes the bluish-green tint of spring water. The fall in temperature seems to affect the water in some curious way, causing it to deposit all the minute weed growths and muddy sediments. When this extra clearness takes place, the fishermen are in despair, catching hardly any fish. It is a fine opportunity for studying the bottom of the river, and very beautiful it looks ; I like then to lie down on the till of my punt with my head over the side, letting the boat drift with the stream, and gaze down into the water. If the sun is shining, the shadow of the boat passes on a little to one side, whilst immediately beneath the punt itself the sunshine lights up the bottom of the river, and as there are no sky reflections everything becomes delightfully visible. The prettiest bits are

always where the stream is swiftest. Every now and then yards of waving masses of the water crowfoot are passed; in autumn it looks merely like long dark green grass combed out smooth and even. It has here and there little silvery stems amongst it, but little else to indicate what plant it is. Large clumps of bright green little leaves are frequently noticed, which are really submerged forget-me-nots, which from their situation can have little hopes of ever throwing up their pretty flowers; then come patches of gravelly ground starred all over with new-sown seedlings of the same plant, interspersed with the dark tuft-like heads of the hornwort. Great shelving basins of deeper water, probably the work of the ballast-dredgers, give variety to the ever-shifting scene, whilst amongst the stones the glitter of mussel-shells attracts the eye.

In the shadows at the end of the long tails of weeds you are pretty sure to come on little parties of roach and dace, and sometimes a barbel grouting along the bottom; then two or three quite large roach or big perch dart across the path of the moving boat. After this, as the ground gets muddier, long waving wracks, interspersed with crumpled lily leaves, form themselves into the most charming patterns, the submerged lily leaves or "water cabbages" grow more prevalent, the water deepens, and the punt, which has been moving slower and slower, at last nearly stops altogether in the slack eddy.

I have often noticed a curious power a fish has of altering its colour. The most noticeable fish in this respect is the perch; among those you catch, some will be of a dark green shade with well marked stripes, whereas others will appear much fainter in colour, and the stripes hardly visible. I believe the live fish changes voluntarily, perhaps in accord with the ground over which

it floats ; amongst the weeds in deep water it appears rich green, and in shallower water of a greenish drab colour. The perch my brother and I had in our little pond changed thus, appearing light or dark even on the same day ; the chub in the pool at Dorchester that I used to watch basking in the sun at the top of the water, appeared much lighter in colour than they did when active and on the feed ; gudgeon too are very different in colour, according to the ground on which they feed : they are marked in such a mottled manner, resembling so much the colour of the bottom, that they are very difficult to see, except when they flick over on their sides. I have noticed jack to be of different shades, though I cannot say whether they change or not ; amongst the weeds they lie so like the colour of their surroundings, and so extremely still, that it requires great experience to detect them. I have in shallow backwaters, when drifting, come over young jack lying on the gravel, and they were then exactly the colour of the bottom, very much as gudgeon are. In a different way, my goldfish alter their colour when they moult their scales ; I have one which, when I first procured it several years ago, was chiefly white with strongly marked black spots about it, and just a few scales of gold here and there ; it has altered every year, and has now almost entirely lost its black spots, and has large patches of red gold all about it, the white gradually giving place to gold ; my other goldfish, too, have changed colour in different ways, chiefly in the case of the spotted and variegated ones. I cannot here resist telling about an interesting experiment on a goldfish, which Mr. Storey and I once tried. Some goldfish belonging to a friend with whom we were staying, suffered from a sort of consumption, and a great many had died ; they were kept in a large tank in

the grape house, and as we discovered one lying on his side quite motionless, we fished him out with a net; his gills, however, moved slightly, and we placed him in a pan of fresh water. The idea struck us of trying some stimulant on him, and having procured some brandy, we poured a little carefully into the water near the fish's head; the effect was quite marvellous, for he instantly righted himself and swam quickly once or twice about the pan. I am sorry to say the cure was only temporary, for he eventually died altogether.

In my account of the river plants a great many have no doubt been left out, a notable one being the mistletoe, which is to be found in many parts of the river; at Cliveden large bunches of this celebrated parasite can be seen amidst the boughs of some tall black poplars; in the summer time it is not so easy to recognize the bushy clusters. I have found it growing on a wild crab on Magpie Eyot, where also a guelder rose bush flourishes, the beautiful red berries of which in the autumn look very inviting.

The teasle, with its quaint heads of prickly bloom and tall bold growth, is not likely to escape the observation of the river traveller. It has the advantage of retaining its form well into the winter, the spined seed-heads remaining like standards on a battle field when all around has yielded to the destroying forces. I have said nothing in this Chapter of many beautiful spring flowers, the yellow iris, the snow-flake, daffodils, lady's smocks, and many others. As these are generally well known to most people, I shall here pass them over. There is one spring flower, however, about which I cannot resist writing a few words. The marsh marigold is one of the river plants that I have a fancy for terming "highly satisfactory;" the fine healthy growth about its stalks and leaves, the decided and vigorous

aspect in its flowers, make it tell splendidly, as an artist would say, amongst the soft grasses of spring. This plant is allied to the buttercup, to the well-known blossoms of which the "Mary buds" bear much resemblance; they are, however, larger and more star-like in character, and there is an approach to aquatic form in the rounded shapes of the deep green glossy leaves of the plant which stamps it with individuality. In the summer the seed-vessels are very quaint and picturesque objects, almost as striking as the blossoms; the plant has a way of blooming a second time, in October if the weather permits, in this respect resembling the autumnal habits of the violet and primrose; this "never say die" sort of character is just what would be expected of such a fine sturdy wild flower.

People who own gardens along the banks of the river ought to take great pains to see that they are in good taste, as they are liable to much observation from passers-by in boats. I am sorry to see that numbers of opportunities for the display of artificial beauty are lost in these gardens, owing, I believe, a great deal to the arrangement being left to the discretion of the gardener; a half-cultivated taste has always a predilection for the eccentricities of nature, and thus we find the copper beech, the weeping willow, the weeping ash, the araucaria, and a lot of shrubs with variegated foliage, perpetually thrust on the observation. Roses, hollyhocks, sunflowers and many other charming plants give way to plum-pudding decoration; the gardener is especially happy when he can obtain a variety of different colours from foliage alone—grey, yellow, and beet-root colour predominating. In the little villages along the Thames any one can see what a beautiful effect a garden has that is planted and cared for by its real owner. I know nothing more delightful than

an ordinary cottage garden ; where the tulips are long in the stalk and quaint in colour, where spiderwort, crown imperial, southernwood, *cœnotheca* and *polyanthus* flourish, and sweet-briar and honeysuckle perfume the air. The small walk up to the door has the flower bed on its sides ; it is "a poor thing, but mine own"—all that can be spared ; the rest of the ground is taken up probably by an old well, and patches of cabbages and potatoes. Mrs. Copeland had such a little strip of garden, and the amount of flowers and vegetables she got out of it was amazing ; loving personal care in the matter of gardens can indeed do wonders.

There is one part of a garden in which the hired gardener certainly does much good. I mean the lawn ; here too much pains cannot be taken, and in the management of the velvet surface of a grass plot, no gardeners in the world can equal those of England. If the propensities to symmetry and neatness which the modern gardener wastes on flower-borders and bedding-out plants, could be turned once more to clipping hedges, and to general tidiness in paths and lawns, the old-fashioned glories of the English garden might easily be revived.

One of the greatest charms of a garden is that it should convey a sense of permanence ; it is pleasant to feel that the place looked the same to one's grandfather, and that it will look the same to our children as it did to us when we were young ; in this respect the clipped hedge is most useful, preserving the general shapes and well-known contours, besides assisting in the perspective effect. But what sense of permanence is derived from bedding-out plants ? They appear to me like so many hired performers that are there only for the season, usurping the places of the true old English hardy perennials. As dis-

tinguished foreigners, I do not object to a few large geraniums or agapanthuses in garden pots, stood in a row, on a terraced path, for then their temporary character is not disguised. Do not let me for an instant be supposed to entertain any prejudice against hot-house flowers, my admiration for which is very great; in the conservatory, the drawing-room, or the cottage window they never fail to please, and it is only when planted out in the open border that the incongruity jars upon my sense of the fitness of things. As there has lately sprung up a growing taste for the domestic architecture of the Queen Anne period, may I not hope that it may extend to the garden, and to the lovely and hardy perennials of the good old days?

CHAPTER IX.

MATTERS CONNECTED WITH THE HISTORY OF HENLEY.—THE PARISH REGISTER.—THE DARK AGES.—BARGE TRAFFIC.—LADY PERIAM.—THE OLD BRIDGE.—THE BRYDE GEAR.—SEVERITY OF THE TAXES.—PARLIAMENTARY TROOPS AT HENLEY.—SIR BULSTRODE WHITELOCK.—PHILLIS COURT.—HUMPHREY GAINSBOROUGH.—MISS BLANDY.—HER TRIAL AND EXECUTION.—STAGE COACHES.—THE “RED LION.”—SHENSTONE’S VERSES.—LORD NEWRY.—FATAL ACCIDENT AT HOLME WOOD.—TRAMPS.—GIPSIES.—FAIRS.



THE weather in the year 1879 was so bad, the whole time I was at Henley, the river all through the summer (?) being in a flooded condition, that I had very few opportunities of enjoying my boat ; I occupied my spare time in finding out what I could about the former days of the old town and its surroundings.

By the kindness of Mr. T. W. Jeston,* one of the oldest

inhabitants of Henley, I obtained access to what is now rather a scarce work, Burn’s “History of Henley.” From the mass

* Mr. Jeston’s father was the Rev. H. Jeston, master of the Henley Royal Grammar School in 1749, and had sole charge of the duties of Henley parish at that time. In the year 1800 he preached a sermon from the drum-head, on Horseshoe Common,

of archæological details with which this interesting book abounds, I have endeavoured to collect a few such odds and ends about the early history of the town as I thought might be interesting to my readers.

And when I say early history of the town, I do not propose to trouble my readers with anything prior to the sixteenth century ; as, unless one is a regular antiquarian, it is difficult to feel direct personal interest in our ancestors of the earlier eras. Shakespeare has rendered the life and character of his age with such a vivid reality that we seem never to have lost touch with our forefathers since his time. We can think of, and picture them in our minds as though we had seen and known them.

In the parish register of Henley, the earliest entries are mostly in Latin ; one of the first which occurs, concerning the burial of a suicide, is highly suggestive of the “Christian burial” colloquy of the grave-diggers in Hamlet :—

“ Aug. 1560, Margaret East uxor Johannis extra Cæmiter’m quoniam occidet se cutello. Sepulta.”

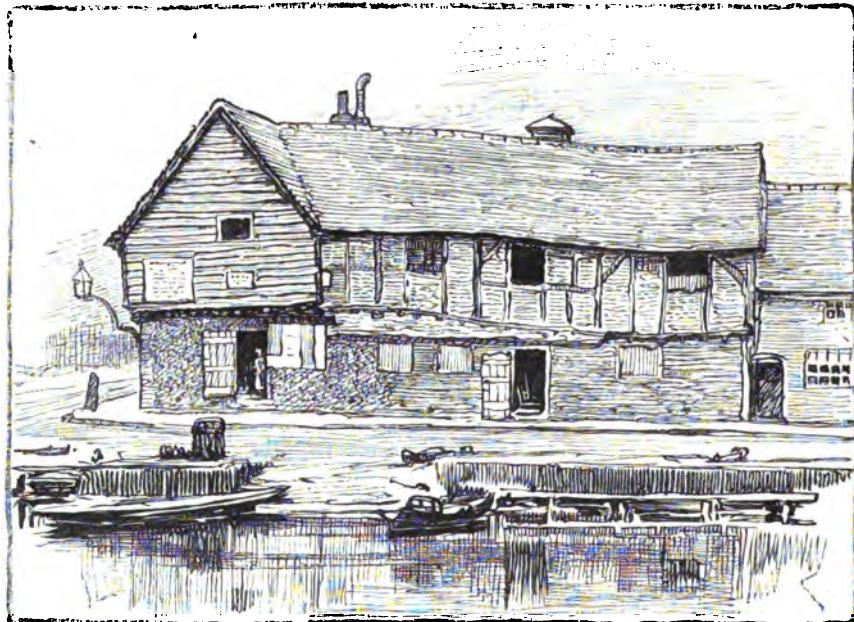
The simple entry of the 13th November, 1560—

“ Clement, the bargeman. Sepultus,”

recalls us to the river and the great trade carried on in malt.

Remenham Hill, to the Henley Volunteers, on the occasion of the presentation of colours to the regiment by a daughter of Lord Malmesbury (then residing at Park Place). Mr. Thomas Ward Jeston joined the army of the Duke of Wellington at Salamanca in 1812, as assistant-surgeon of the 36th Regiment of Foot, and was with the army till the end of the war in 1814. In 1815 he was gazetted to the 5th Dragoon Guards, but missed being present at the battle of Waterloo ; he returned to his native town in 1816, and has been in practice there as a medical man ever since. He was born on the 3rd of June, 1790, and is therefore in his 91st year ; he is, I am happy to say, hale and hearty, and able still to walk up Remenham Hill.

n Blome's "Britannia," 1573, we find the following : " Henley enjoyeth a considerable trade for maulting ; its inhabitants (which for the most part are bargemen or watermen) gain a livelihood by transporting of mault, wood, and other goods to London, and in return bring such commodities as they and the



Sack-hiring Depot, Henley.

inhabitants of the adjacent townes have need of, at easie rates : and its market, which is on Thursdays, is very considerable for corn, especially barley, which is brought there for the great mault trade, there being oft-times in one day sold about three hundred cartloads of barley."

Henley still possesses a very considerable wharf frontage on the river, both above and below the bridge. Near River

Terrace there is a very picturesque old range of granary barns, or "sack-hiring depots" as they are called, which I grieve to say are shortly to be pulled down.

Another bargeman's burial is recorded in a later entry :—

"30 April, 1611. James, a bargeman, called Sweetapple, being drowned. Sepultus."

There is something of Shakespearian quaintness about the unfortunate James Sweetapple's name, which is very delightful.

Many of the earlier entries in the register afford a vivid notion of the proverbial darkness of the olden times, and of the difficulties to be encountered in the faithful administration of "Crowner's-quest law" in those days, as for instance, the following :—

" 8 April, 1563. Ignotus quidam viator. Sepultus.
21 Feb. 1599. A pore woma', a traveller. Sepulta.
24 May, 1601. John Smith, a stranger, drowned. Sepultus."

Two speak badly for the morality of the period :—

" July, 1581. Francis Bucke, filia Francristi ex incestu nata.
Baptizata.
10 Jan. 1590. A child found dead in a haye mowe. Sepultus."

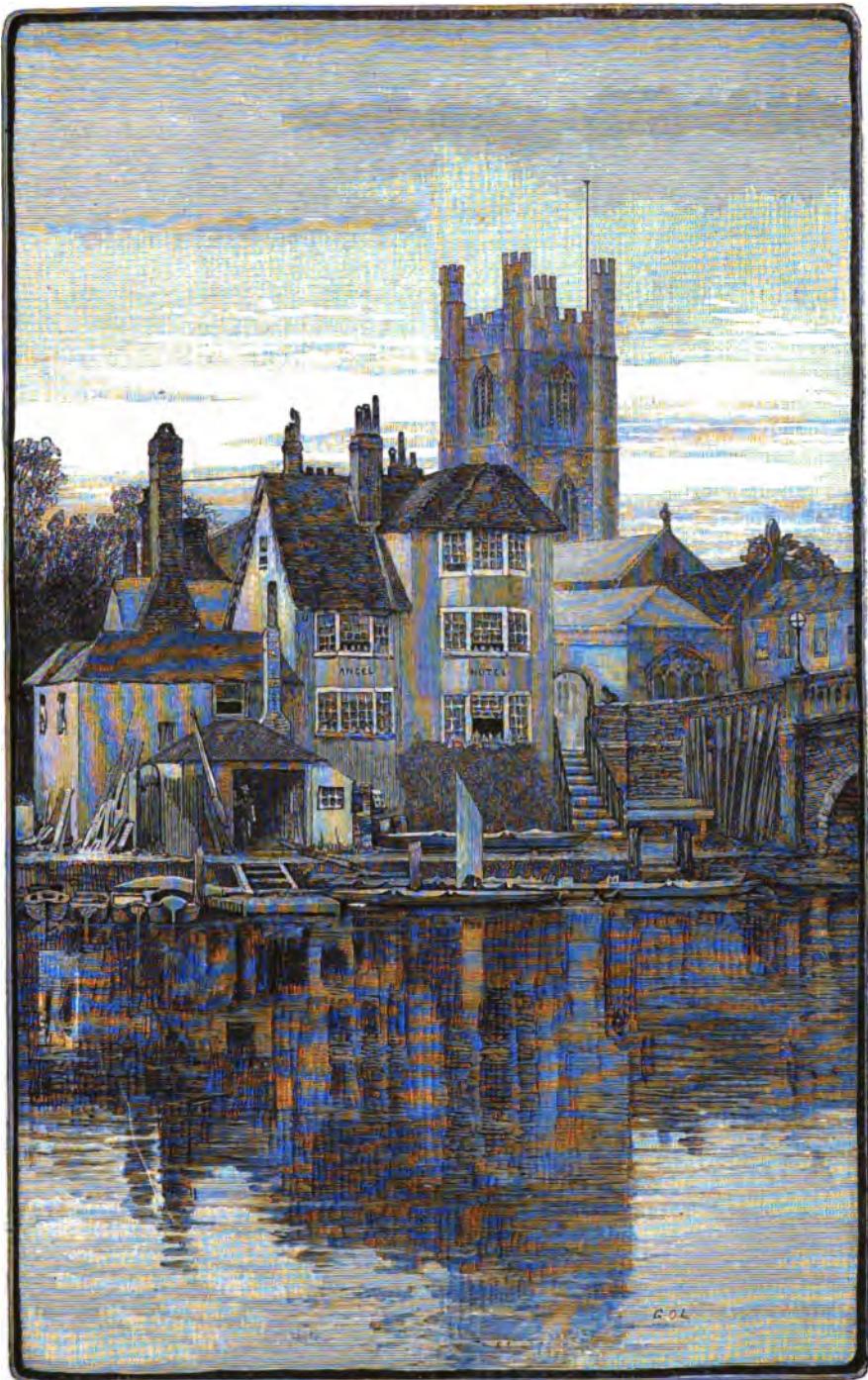
The following I cannot refrain from quoting, on account of the quaintness of the name :—

" 6 April, 1567. Dorothie Grypes, Generosa. Sepulta."

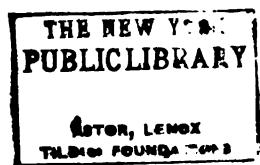
On the 4th July, 1591, is recorded the baptism of William Lenthall 'filius Joh'is—gent.' This was the celebrated William Lenthall, Speaker of the House of Commons in 1640.

The entry of May 24th, 1621, records an event which must have occasioned great excitement in the old town, no less than the burial of the Lady Dame Elizabeth Periam, of Greenlands, sister of the great Lord Bacon. She died May 3rd, and so must have laid in state about twenty days. Her effigy, in quaint old Elizabethan costume, which used to stand in the north aisle of Henley Church, has, according to approved modern taste, been removed, with a number of other humbler memorials, to an out of the way corner under the tower ; she is represented reclining on her side, in mantle and coif ; the inscription commences "Memoriæ Sacrum Dignissimæ Dominæ Dominæ Eliza Periam Vidux," and goes on to state how she first married Robert D'Oyley, next Henry Neville, and lastly William Periam, and was the founder of a school for the education of twenty poor girls in the town of Henley.

I love to picture this great lady in ruff and fardingale, and the excitement of the good townsfolk when she paid them a visit from Greenlands, landing at the quay by the "Red Lion" from her stately barge ; the surrounding buildings, the river and the old bridge forming the most picturesque background that could possibly be imagined. The old bridge was built partly of stone and partly of wood, and had been patched and mended so frequently, that there can be little doubt as to the variety of its appearance ; it had a chapel on it, and a large corn-barn, used no doubt to load barges from, as they by mooring underneath the arch, could thus receive their cargoes with the greatest ease. The bridge had also gates at each end of it. The old bridge, built first in stone, and afterwards repaired with timber in 1483, after repeated patchings and repairings, was finally destroyed in 1774 by the great flood of the 12th of March ; a stone on the



Henley-on-Thames.



wall of the "Red Lion" thus records the event:—"In the flood in 1774, on March the 11th, the Thames rose to this stone." On the Berks shore, some traces of the land piers of the old bridge can still be seen at the boat landing-stage, and in the cellars of the adjacent small public-house an arch is seen, which no doubt formed part of the old bridge.

In the year 1518 a certain Lady Johns gave to the church of Henley, a collar, fillet and coronal, to be lent to decorate brides at their weddings; the sums paid for the hire of these decorations, which were termed "the Bride Gear," went to defray the expenses of the five tapers at the shrine of Our Lady.

The following entries in the church books give details of this curious custom:—

"3rd Oct., 9th Hy. 8.—At the whych congregacion my Lady Johns, of London, gave to the churche, and to the meyntenance of our Lady lyght, of Henley; first a coler of selv' and gylt, conteignyng xxij barres and xij stones in them, xxij double flowres with xij labells:—A fylet with xxvi perlys, with mayden here; and a past with a stone set full of perlys, and a cronall with viij great stones, and set full of perlys—lakking one perle. And the same day yt ys determined by the Warden and his bredren, that if the seyd gere be lend owte into the countrey for the mariage of any person, they to pay ijs. iijs., and to save it harmles, or more after their degrees. And within the town for every Burges daughter xx. and other ijs. iijs., and to save yt and kepe yt harmles in as good case as they fynd yt."

Some years afterwards it was sold to raise money for some pressing wants, and brought ten pounds six shillings and eight-pence.

In the troubled times of the Revolutionary wars Henley figured repeatedly as the scene of skirmishes between the

Royalists and Parliamentarians. The old registry has several simple entries which testify to the bloodshed :—

“ Jan. 22, 1642.—This day were buried six souldiers, whereof four were slain with the discharging of a canon as they marched up Duck Street, to assault the towne.

“ Jan. 24.—A souldier.

“ Feb. 6.—A souldier.”

By an old ordinance of the time of Edward IV., Henley had for a long time been expected regularly to supply the king with four soldiers, armed with coats of mail, and bows and halbersts : there are several entries in the town records relating to the furnishing and equipping of this contingent at various times, which was generally sent off to Portsmouth, “ to serve His Majesty as he may think fit.” There are also other records as to the severity of the taxes that were imposed on the town, and the cruelties exercised in the collecting of the same ; from which one can easily see how it came to pass that the town of Henley sided chiefly with the Parliamentary party :—

“ In 1643, Major-General Skippon, for the Parliament, made Fillis Court-house a strong and regular fort ; the Thames was brought into the grafts round about it ; cannon, and a considerable garrison of about 300 foot and a troop of horse, were placed in it, and this was rather done to watch the garrison of Greenlands, which, for a little fort, was made very strong for the king, and between these garrisons stood Fawley Court, miserably torn and plundered by each of them.”

Sir Bulstrode Whitelock, who owned both Fillis and Fawley Courts, after the wars were over, anxious to enjoy his country houses, had all the fortifications removed in 1646. “ The grafts or ditches filled up, and the drawbridge pulled up, and levelled and sent away ; also the great guns, the granadoes,

fireworks, and ammunition, whereof there was good store in the fort."

Fawley Court was so badly used by the troops that Sir Bulstrode could not return to it; he retired to his place in Wiltshire, and in 1672 he made over the manors of Henley and Phillis Court, and also Henley Park, to his son William. The present mansion of Fawley Court was erected in 1684, from designs by Sir Christopher Wren.

Of the old manor house of Phillis or Fillet's Court, the principal parts were pulled down about 1788, and the remaining portions (with the exception of the ancient kitchen) were, about 1837, removed to make room for a modern residence. "A fine terrace walk by the margin of the stream, the bowling-green, fish ponds, &c., attest its former magnificence, and though in the formal style of antique gardening, are very picturesque." (Why the antique style of gardening should not be picturesque, I am at a loss to imagine.) "In pulling down an old summer-house in 1830, the following lines were found written in pencil :—

Ah ! much lov'd banks, my infancy's delight,
How chang'd, how fal'n, ye meet my mournful sight ;
May this lone relic of the beauteous scene
Long stand to shew what Phyllis Court has been.

S. GRANDISON, 1794."

To return to our parish register: two entries which testify to the healthiness and fertility of the town, are the last in it which I shall extract :—

"Feb. 16, 1797.—Catherine Tullocks, 36, died in child-bed, with four children born alive."

"May 17, 1797.—Ann Ainsworth, 99, buried."

In 1748 the Rev. Humphrey Gainsborough, a brother of the celebrated artist, was the pastor of the Independent Chapel in South Street, and his own and his wife's epitaphs are on the walls of the chapel. There is an account of this extraordinary man in Fulcher's life of Gainsborough. His genius was of the inventive and mechanical order, a great many curious machines and contrivances having been originated by him; he is supposed by some to have been the discoverer of the separate condenser for steam engines. As regards Henley itself, he it was who planned the pound locks in the vicinity; and to him we are indebted for the road to the town over White Hill, the hill having been lowered and the valley filled up by means which he contrived, at a comparatively small expense; this was the now well-known plan of working the empty carts up the hill by the impetus of the loaded ones in going down. The Corporation also intrusted to him the construction of the weighing machine for the town, and he constructed and arranged the arch in the road to Twyford, over the grounds of Park Place, known as "the Happy Valley;" the stones for this bridge were brought from Reading Abbey. He was universally loved and respected, and men of high degree in the neighbourhood offered him very good preferment in the Established Church, if he would have taken ordination, but nothing could prevail upon him to leave his own little flock. In the Gentleman's Magazine, 1786, his death is thus referred to:—

"Mr. Gainsborough departed this life suddenly in a place near Henley, while he was conversing with some gentlemen about the locks of the river, which he had constructed, and of which I think he was treasurer, having about £70 of the money belonging to that useful work in his pocket at the time."

It is quite likely that the old horse-bridge at Marsh Lock, which everybody who has seen must have admired for its picturesqueness, and which I am sorry to say is soon to give way to the inevitable iron, was constructed after the designs of the Rev. Humphrey Gainsborough.

One of the most tragic events of the last century connected with the history of Henley, was the trial and execution of a young lady named Mary Blandy for the poisoning of her father. The story is extremely distressing, the main features being as follows. She was the only daughter of a respectable attorney of Henley, who lived not far from the "Catherine Wheel," in Hart Street; he, in hopes of getting a good husband for the girl, gave out rather ostentatiously that she would inherit a fortune of £10,000; the temptation of the money, coupled with the personal attractions of the young lady herself, drew the attentions to her of a certain Captain William Henry Cranstoun, who had come to Henley with a recruiting party. This villain was of a good Scotch family, but had been given to vicious courses from his youth up. He had, before his visit to Henley, contracted a marriage with a Miss Murray; the marriage had been a private one, and on getting into monetary difficulties, he conceived the plan of getting rid of this wife, and then looking out for a lady of fortune. He denied at first that he was married to Miss Murray at all, hoping that as her relations had been involved in the Jacobite affairs of 1745, he should have no interference with his schemes; but in spite of this, the case was brought on to trial, and according to the Scotch law, he was declared to have legally married Miss Murray, the Lords of Session giving a judgment that settled fifty pounds a year on the wife. In spite of this, Cranstoun, at Henley, gained

the affections of Miss Blandy, and proposed a runaway match, with the hope of afterwards securing her money. In the meantime the gossips of Henley had learnt the scandal of his previous marriage, and the father, on hearing of it, forbade his daughter to have anything more to say to the Captain.

The young people however continued a clandestine correspondence, and having occasional interviews. At length Cranstoun suggested the advisability of getting rid of the father by poison. He sent the young lady presents of some Scotch pebbles, and along with them a powder, which was described as one to polish them with, but which in reality was white arsenic. There is no doubt but that the daughter administered this at intervals to her father, and after an extra dose of it, in some water-gruel, the old man died with extreme suffering. On her trial, Miss Blandy confessed to having administered the powder, but asserted that she did it innocently, having been told by Cranstoun that it was merely a powder which would have the effect of restoring her father's love to her lover. Unfortunately she had carefully burnt all Cranstoun's letters and papers immediately her father died, and could give no evidence of the truth of her assertion. She made a long speech, defending herself, but as the case was clearly proved against her, a verdict of "Guilty" was returned, and on the 6th of April, 1752, she was executed at Oxford.

On her apprehension the mob's indignation was so strong against her, that she was obliged to take refuge in the Angel Hotel, to escape being pulled to pieces. But after her condemnation and execution, the fickle mob were equally moved in her favour, and at her burial in Henley Church, an enormous crowd attended her funeral, which took place in the middle of the night. In an old periodical of the time, from which I have

obtained this story, her execution is described in the following curious and graphic manner :—

“ This morning Miss Blandy was executed at Oxford, in the same black petelair she was dressed in at her trial ; she had on a black pair of gloves, and her hands and arms were tied with black paduasoy ribbons. * * * Her behaviour at the gallows was becoming a person in her unhappy circumstances, and drew not only great compassion, but tears, from most of the spectators. When got up about five steps of the ladder, she said, ‘ Gentlemen, I beg you will not hang me high, for the sake of decency ;’ and being desired to go a little higher, she did, two steps more ; and then, turning herself on the ladder, had a little trembling, and said, ‘ I am afraid I shall fall.’ After she had turned herself on the ladder, the Rev. Mr. Swinton, who attended her, said, ‘ Madam, have you anything to say to the public ?’ She said, ‘ Yes,’ and then made a speech to the following purport : ‘ That as she was then going to appear before a just God, she did not know that the powders, which were supposed to be the death of her father, would have done him any harm, therefore she was innocently the cause of his death, and, as she had been suspected to have poisoned her mother, she declared that she never had been so much as innocently the cause of her illness or death.’ And then, desiring all present to pray for her, she pulled a white handkerchief, which was tied round her head for that purpose, over her eyes, which, not being low enough, a person standing by, stepped up the ladder, and pulled it further down ; then giving the signal, by holding out a little book which she had in her hand, she was turned off. Before she went out of the gaol, she gave the sheriffs’ men a guinea to drink, and took two guineas in her hands with her, which she gave to the executioner. * * * In the afternoon her body was carried to Henley in a coffin lined with white satin, and according to her own desire, was deposited in the church there, between her father and mother. The funeral took place at one o’clock in the morning, and notwithstanding the hour, there was the greatest concourse of people ever seen on such an occasion.”

A walk in the grounds of Park Place used to be called Miss Blandy’s Walk, and her ghost, riding on a white horse, was

believed to haunt a place called Skermott, a little above Hambledon village. All that is known as to what became of Captain Cranstoun, is that from that time he led the life of an outcast and a vagabond.

Horace Walpole, in one of his letters, alludes to the trial of Miss Blandy, and writes in very indignant strains about the popular excitement, and sentiments of commiseration which were evoked by it.

Miss Blandy's sad story brings us down to comparatively recent times, the good old coaching days, when Henley, being on the high road to Oxford, Bath, and Birmingham, was all alive with the passing traffic; the "Defiance," the "Tantivy," the "Magnet," the "Berkeley Hunt," the "Alert," and the Wycombe and Marlow sociables, passed daily through the town. An old inhabitant of Henley has informed me that the "Defiance" was a white coach with grey horses, and driven by a well-known character, William Bowers, surnamed "Black Will." He was very popular with the young Oxford men, and they at one time presented him with a handsome set of red morocco leather harness, which must have looked very smart on the greys, with large red peonies in their ears. Bowers was once examined as a witness in a lawsuit, and the Judge asked him if he was not known by the name of "Black Will." "I used to be, my Lord," he replied, "but now people call me Fair William"; his hair having turned grey. My informant also told me that the "Tantivy" was a light red coach, and the fastest of any; the "Magnet" blue, and the "Berkeley Hunt" yellow.

The "Red Lion" in the coaching days was in its full glory; its landlord, Mr. Dixon, was justly famed, and the mutton chops

of Mrs. Dixon were so celebrated for their excellence, that it is reported that George the Fourth, when Prince of Wales, dined here, and ate fourteen of these dainties. In Jesse's "Angler's Rambles" there is a pretty notice of this hotel :—

"I must not omit to mention Henley-on-Thames, where good trout are frequently caught. The mutton chops of my old friend Mrs. Dixon are altogether unrivalled, and she has the art of making all her guests happy and contented. I always enjoy myself greatly at her house, not only with reference to the beautiful scenery which I see all around, but from the real comfort and cleanliness of everything about me; the sheets repose in lavender till they are wanted, and her beds are neatness itself."

Mrs. Dixon was succeeded by her son, Mr. J. Dixon, who died in 1849, and the Inn was shut up from 1852 to 1859, when it was reopened by its present landlady, Mrs. Williams, from the "Catherine Wheel." The "Red Lion" is the house made famous by having inscribed on one of its window panes, Shewstone's well-known lines; the last verse of which being the only one that is generally remembered and quoted, it may not be amiss here to give the whole five.

To thee, fair freedom ! I retire
From flattery, cards, and dice, and din :
Nor art thou found in mansions higher
Than the low cot or humble inn.

'Tis here, with boundless power I reign,
And ev'ry health which I begin
Converts dull port to bright champagne :
Such freedom crowns it at an inn.

I fly from pomp, I fly from state !
I fly from falsehood's specious grin !
Freedom I love, and form I hate,
And chuse my lodgings at an inn.

Here, waiter, take my sordid ore,
 Which lackeys else might hope to win,
 It buys what Courts have not in store—
 It buys me freedom at an inn.

Whoe'er has travell'd life's dull round,
 Where'er his stages may have been,
 May sigh to think he still has found
 The warmest welcome at an inn.

The two other Inns at Henley, the "Catherine Wheel" and the "Bull," are both very old ; the former has always been and still is deservedly celebrated. The "Bull," though smaller, has a wonderfully picturesque front to it, older by far than the present buildings of the other hotels. A great many of the old houses in Henley of the last century are very fine in their brick-work ; the interiors of many that I have seen have nice old-fashioned wainscots, chimney pieces, and window embrasures.

My friend Mr. H. S. Marks's grandmother resided in New Street, and he tells me he remembers as a boy, coming down by the coach to see her ; and that his uncles had rowed in the Regatta. He particularly recollects that the name of their boat was "The Wave." Fancy a racing ship of the present day having a name !

On the 15th of August, 1822, Lord Newry,* with five servants of his, performed the feat of rowing from Oxford to London in eighteen hours. The boat left the Folly Bridge as Great Tom struck 3 A.M., and arrived at Godfrey and Searle's wharf one minute and a half before 9, thus winning by ninety seconds ; his Lordship and men in a state of great exhaustion. Joseph Gould, the lock-keeper at Hambledon, told my friend Miss Stapleton, that in order to save as much

* Francis Jack, afterwards Viscount Kilmorey, who died 1880, aged 93.

time as possible the locks were all open to receive the boat the instant it arrived ; he also said the rowers had little rolls of bread dipped in brandy to sustain them on the way. In passing Hambledon Lock Lord Newry asked for a corkscrew for the brandy bottle. Gould threw him one, but unfortunately the point of it struck his Lordship in the palm of his hand, wounding him in a way that must have hurt him very much when rowing. Gould, after the boat had passed, ran up Aston Lane, got on the London coach, and reached town in time to see the rowers arrive.

Gould also told Miss Stapleton that he had seen Lord Newry frequently bathing at the weir at Hambledon ; his Lordship was a very expert swimmer, and he would sometimes throw his little boy, a child of eight years old, into the dashing water, and then jump in after him and fetch him ashore as a dog would a stick. The family motto of Lord Kilmorey is " *Nunc aut nunquam*," which seems singularly appropriate in the case of this bathing incident.

At Holmewood, on the road from Henley to Reading, there happened a good many years ago a sad accident which was singular in its fatal termination. A brother of Lord Camoys, Mr. Charles Stonor, was superintending the felling of a tree in the park ; the tree coming down rather sooner than was expected struck the poor gentleman and crushed him in the most dreadful manner. He was not quite dead, however, and was taken into the house ; the butler was despatched to Reading for the doctor. In the meantime Mr. Stonor having ceased to breathe, another servant was sent off to recall the butler, and save the doctor the trouble of the night's ride. The butler was returning from Reading when he met the servant from Holme-

wood. The night was very dark, and both men riding at full speed their horses came into collision, and the poor butler was thrown off, and killed on the spot.

There is a famous intermittent brook which flows into the Thames at Henley, called Assenden Spring ; it rises from under several trees on the estate of Lord Camoys, on each side of the road from Henley to Watlington, about five miles from the former town. This spring has been supposed by some to act on the principle of the siphon, and to be supplied from subterranean sources. The little brook at Hambleton has a similar trick of drying up in some years. Assenden Spring, however, runs much less frequently than the Hamble Brook. I need not say that it ran furiously in 1879, the wettest season I ever remember. A singular circumstance connected with this spring occurred some years ago. A little child playing in the street by the side of the stream fell in, and was carried with great rapidity underground the whole length of New Street to the river. A man who had seen the accident ran down to the river, and reached it in time to catch the child and rescue her on her emerging at the drain's mouth by the river. The child sustained little injury, and lived to become the mother of a family.

As my cottage at Remenham is on the high road from London to Oxford, I have frequent opportunities for studying the various tramps that pass that way. I own to having a sort of admiration for these wandering tribes, partly arising from their general picturesqueness, and partly perhaps the taste may be inherited from my mother, who in spite of all the advice and cautions given her by the local Charitable Organizationists, will persist in giving alms to some of these folks, especially when

the applicant happens to be a gipsy woman with a baby. The regular lazy, vulgar male tramp, is certainly a disagreeable character, but the gipsies, wandering hawkers, haymakers, and even the organ grinder on the tramp, are by no means so ; the colour of their garments, together with their hard, brown, worn faces are altogether in perfect harmony with the rural surroundings. Last summer, a Frenchman and woman came by with a dancing bear, to the great delight of my children. The woman was tall and handsome, dressed in the dark French blue, with a yellow handkerchief about her head ; a large bundle, surmounted by a good roomy cooking-pot, was attached to her back. The man as usual carried nothing ; he merely led the bear by a chain attached to its nose muzzle, and performed a very comic, uncouth sort of waltz with the animal.

Why do tramps, when resting by the roadside, always sit with their feet in the ditch ? I have often noticed this habit, and when I see them at times lying on their faces sound asleep on the damp grass, cannot help wondering how it is they escape their "deaths o' cold." If none the worse for this practice, they are certainly much to be envied for the convenient hardness which allows them to lie down anywhere, and take a nap whenever they choose. Closely allied to the tramp are the travellers in the little caravans covered with basket-work, from the midst of which a small chimney tells of the snugness within. I have all my life longed to live in one of these caravans. When a fair is held at some neighbouring town, great numbers of these travelling houses go by. About a dozen vehicles of this description last year passed our house, all belonging to a great steam merry-go-round, which was erected for a couple of days in a meadow just by Henley Bridge. I much hope, for

the sake of old times, that these country wakes, fairs and revels, will never be done away with. They still abound at all the riverside villages in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Besides the regular fairs, there are many minor occasions at which members of the gipsy fraternity attend with "knock-'em-downs," and shooting targets for nuts. When Mr. Marks and I were at Benson, the village Benefit Club held its annual dinner at the "Crown" Inn, where we were stopping; and looking out of our bedroom window on the morning of the festivities, we were much amused by watching two rival parties of gipsies with trays of nuts and shooting targets. One old man and woman had arrived first, and having selected the best situation commenced putting up their little apparatus, when the second party arrived, consisting of an energetic young woman, an old woman, a little boy, and a middle-aged, bullet-headed man, in a red plush waistcoat, with sleeves to it and tight leather gaiters on his legs. He had a clean-shaved face, and was as round and sleek as a guinea-pig; there were no creases or wrinkles about him anywhere, his mode of life evidently agreeing with him. He rode on the small donkey-cart in which the apparatus and bags of nuts were loaded, the rest of his party walked. He took no part whatever in the unpacking, and even left the energetic woman to wrangle for the site of their stall with the previously arrived party. The young woman, with great volubility, calmly proceeded to take down the enemies' traps amidst the unavailing complaints of their owners. The bullet-headed man representing the standing army of his little following, walked silently about, a mere idle demonstration of latent force. The other side feeling the uselessness of resistance, yielded their ground, though not without a great quantity of bad language.

The situation being secured, the energetic young woman got breakfast ready for her lord and master, who sat on the ground with his back against the wall in the morning sun enjoying the slices of bread-and-butter, and a large slop basin of tea without milk, with such evident relish, that we christened him "the Sybarite." I remember my admiration for the satisfaction he seemed to take in his tea, reached even to the pitch of imitation, as I actually gave up milk in my tea for a long time in consequence.

Frederick Walker thoroughly appreciated the sentiment and poetry of this class of wanderers, as his dramatic oil picture entitled "The Vagrants" testifies. I do not think he ever painted anything finer than the wild weather-worn girl on the right in this picture, who appears to smother some secret grief within her bosom, and sternly hardens herself against the desolation of her lot; she is the very personification of defiant misery.

His picture entitled "The Wayfarers," representing an old blind soldier piloted along a wet and muddy lane by a graceful boy, is likewise full of the sentiment of the weary roadway.

The song of Autolycus,

"Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,"

and poor Tom's

"Sessy, come, march to wakes and fairs,
And market towns ;"

and many other passages in Shakespeare are suggestive of the tramps of his times; whilst Edie Ochiltree, the jolly beggars, Partridge, and a host of other worthies, rise in my memory, making me regret that improved vagrant laws, cheap railway

fares, and the enclosing of waste places, are likely to clear the highways of the future to a great extent of these picturesque wanderers. Wakes and fairs in market towns are more and more discredited every year. The Pink-eyed Lady, the Prussian Dwarf, and the Living Skeleton, give way to mammoth American circuses; even Cheap Jacks are not so common now as travelling photographers. Gipsies will, I suppose, continue for some time to enliven the roads with their bright reds and orange; their hooped tents and boiling kettles will still be occasionally seen, but even gipsies have become vulgarized by advancing civilization, not being nearly so grand in character now as in the old days of Fairlop Fair, which my father painted, and to which he often took me as a boy.

CHAPTER X.

DESCRIPTION OF HENLEY REGATTA.—BOAT RACING.—REGATTAS IN EARLY DAYS.—THE DAY BEFORE THE REGATTA.—THE TRAINS.—THE UMPIRE'S BOAT.—THE RACE-COURSE.—A RACE.—THE PUNT AT THE REGATTA.—THE LAWN AT PHILLIS COURT.—AN AMERICAN REGATTA.—HARVARD AND YALE.—THE EVENING AFTER THE RACES.—FOREIGN CREWS.—RAIN.—TOWN AND WATER-MEN'S REGATTA.—GUY FAWKES DAY AT HENLEY.



O MOST people of the present day, the name of Henley is familiar, chiefly in connection with the annual Regattas. These boat-races have to my mind one charm which does not appertain to horse racing ; it is the feeling of certainty that the contests are genuine, the class to which the competitors belong, guaranteeing the entire absence of complicity or underhand

knavery. The Henley Regattas more closely resemble than anything else in modern times, the old Olympian and Isthmian games of the classic ages, or the jousts and tournaments of the days of chivalry. The very pick of the best-bred young

men in England here manfully compete over a mile and a quarter, for the coveted and honourable prize.

The spectators are more select and respectable than those who frequent the turf. At Henley there is no betting ring, no book-makers with their depraved features and yelling noise ; ladies and gentlemen are the rule there, and not the exceptions. The young athletes strive before their friends', relations', or it may be their sweethearts' eyes ; their college chums or boating friends rush along the bank, and cheer and urge them on. Glory and honour are there the well-merited prizes for pluck and endurance. There is such a genuine ring in the cheers which greet the visitors, that one is not astonished to find that it has reached across the Atlantic, finding in the hearts that dwell in the Far West an echo, which more than once has stirred them up to cross the ocean, to contest the prize with their English cousins. These remarks apply also to cricket matches, and other athletic sports, but in the variety and beauty of the scene, and in the dashing excitement of the contest, a river regatta is immeasurably superior. At Lord's or Prince's the game to the onlookers is at best rather monotonous ; neither can they move about so easily or pleasantly as on the lovely reach at Henley. The crowded luncheon on the drag top at a cricket match, is no better than one at Epsom or Ascot, whereas at Henley, each party can picnic with ease and freedom in every variety of way ; there is no dust, nor smell of sodden turf, and comparative freedom from swindlers and roughs.

In old times, Henley Regatta was a very different affair ; all along the meadows at the back of the tow-path, pugilists and fighting booths abounded. It frequently happened that young

rowing men would get involved in fights or quarrels amongst the crowd ; indeed in those days, not the least coveted of the laurels that could be carried away from Henley, was to be won in a fair stand-up fight with a bargee or pugilist. When we remember that stage coaches or travelling rowing boats, were almost the only means of then reaching Henley from a distance, it is easy to comprehend that the gathering must have been much smaller, more local in character, and different in every way from the gay assemblage of the present day. Much as the railway has been abused for spoiling the country, in this case I am sure it has to be thanked for the orderliness and refinement which it has brought to the river side, rendering Henley on Regatta day a place of all others at which ladies may safely appear, and adorn the gay scene with their fair faces and pretty toilets.

The week before the races begin, Henley seems to wake up from its usual apathy ; along the high roads boats on carts are seen continually arriving ; various crews take up their quarters about the town, their respective flags hanging out from the upper windows. On the bridge from morn till night a constant string of idlers and rowing men lean on the balustrade, watching the practice or gossiping with each other. The time-honoured timbers of the Grand Stand are brought out and solemnly fixed in their places. There is nothing very grand about this stand, for it is not unlike a large, broad, "Punch and Judy" box.

On the day before the race, the scene becomes still more animated ; a line of empty carriages is formed across the bridge on the side overlooking the course ; a few gipsies, with Aunt Sallies and knock-em-downs, come wandering up, whilst boats and boatmen from all parts of the river, gradually fill every available landing-place along the quays between the

bridge and the railway-station. Wherever camping is allowed, small tents are seen, with their picturesque inhabitants busy in cooking, and making themselves at home. Great house-boats and steam launches, one after another, are taking up their positions along the appointed line, which, gay with bunting, already stretches down towards Phillis Court. There are also numbers of small boats and punts with awnings rigged up in them, beneath which parties of two or three make themselves independent of lodgings in the town. The occupants of these boats, and the campers generally, affect picturesque and rather outlandish costumes. Frequently at this time, two or three of them are met with, on foraging expeditions up the town, carrying great stone jugs for beer, or baskets of potatoes and meat.

The bathing-place in the morning is crowded, and, indeed, the variety of costumes and characters that throng the tow-path, the bridge, and the streets, are quite peculiar to Henley at Regatta time.

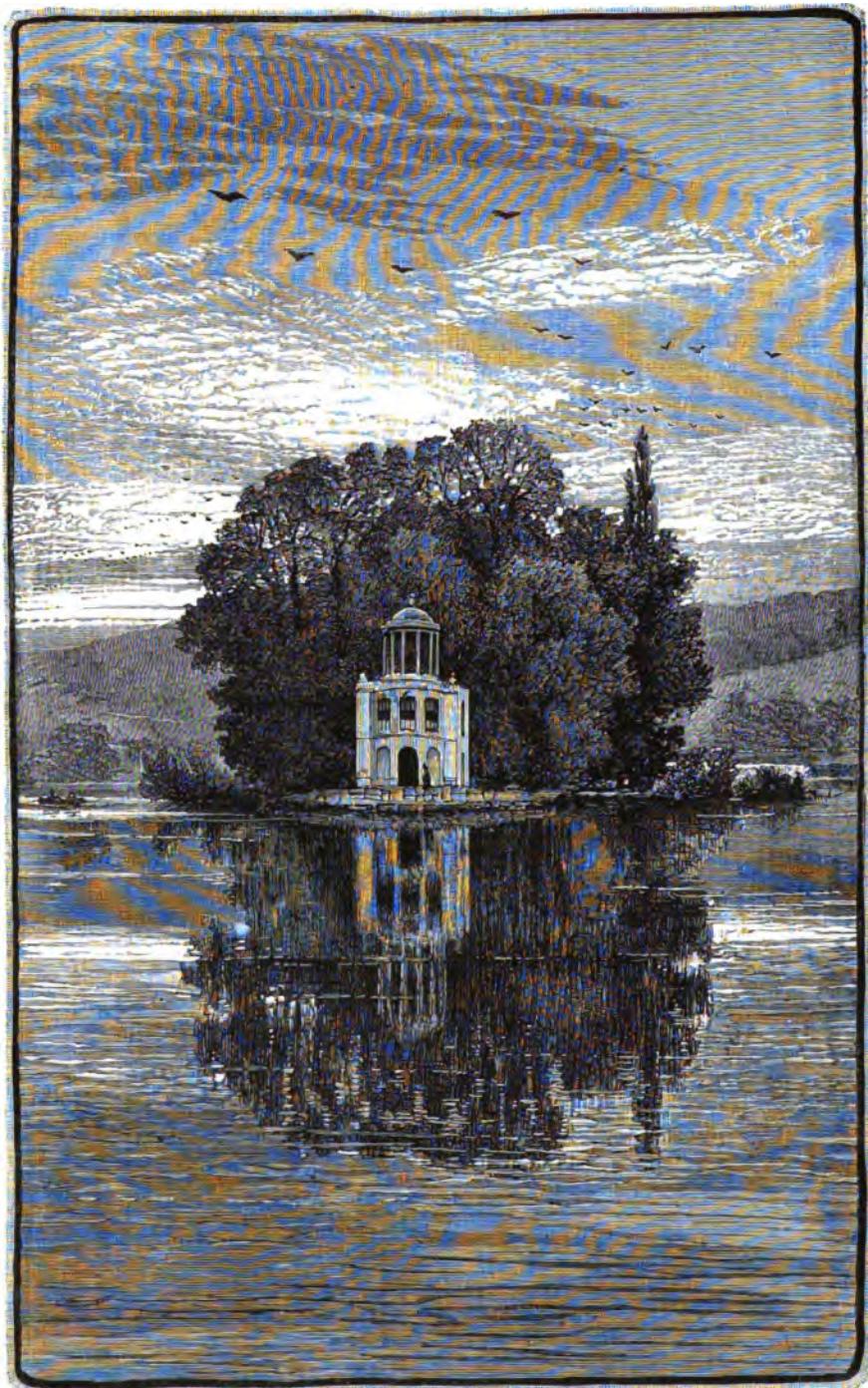
Early in the morning of the first day's racing, the bells of the old church ring out in the most cheering way; boats arrive in numbers from both up and down the river. The very early trains bring down a large mixture of itinerant fruitsellers, niggers, organ-grinders, boatmen, and general riff-raff, along with some of the more eager and interested of the spectators. The later trains are reserved for the *elite*; at Paddington the crowd on the platform, for these trains, is never a disagreeable or formidable one to mix in; the trains are well-managed, run frequently, and if only the sun shines, all are smiling and happy. From the windows of the train as it passes over the bridge at Shiplake, you may catch sight of numerous boat-loads, wending

their way along down stream, and sometimes of one of those huge barges from Reading, with crowds of people standing on the deck. In a former chapter I gave an account of Marsh Lock on a Regatta day ; the lock below at Hambledon is also very crowded on the mornings of the boat-races, but as it is entered against the stream, getting in and out of it is a far less difficult matter.

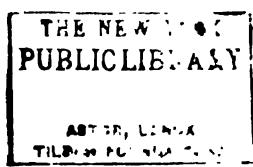
Not the least of the pleasures of the Regatta day, to a regular frequenter of the river, are the numerous nods and greetings which are received from old river-side friends and acquaintances of every sort. About ten o'clock a large waggonette, carrying the Eton boys, passes along the road in front of my mother's cottage ; they all look very serious, and as old and manly as they possibly can. Racing ships and outriggers are now being lifted about carefully down by the boat-houses ; the various colours of the different rowing-clubs assume large and distinct masses, as the birds of a feather flock together, and form into knots of uniformity. The umpire's boat is seen getting up steam—a long, rakish-looking craft, with no cabins or railings about it ; a boat of reputed fabulous speed, since celebrated in connection with the sad disaster at Shepperton. The umpire's boat is not popular with the floating spectators, partly on account of the rocking about they get from its swell, and partly on account of its taking, throughout the day, various parties of ladies and gentlemen as passengers. To this latter practice I most strongly object. I do not know whether any charge is made for the trip, but even if the passage is free, there is great want of taste about thus crowding a boat which at best is only tolerated as a necessary evil, and in which none but the umpire and some Press representatives ought to be allowed to

accompany the engine-driver and steerer. Mr. Lord, on a paddle-wheel steamer belonging to the Thames Conservancy, is now seen busy in putting things to rights; seeing that the various large craft are moored in their proper line, and sometimes towing obstructive barges right up through the bridge, far off out of harm's way; indeed, throughout the day, Mr. Lord has a very hard time of it, and I believe few are aware how much of the comfort and orderliness of the Regattas are due to his skill, energy, and good temper.

The river gradually gets covered with boats in every direction. Train after train arrives, and happy crowds come streaming along in front of River Terrace down to the boats, or off in search of the friends they expect to meet. Fortunate are those who find their boats or friends safely at the appointed place, and many are the anxious people seen searching in vain, surrounded and harassed by the speculative boatmen who have brought up for the occasion every sort of thing with oars that will float, which are to be hired for fabulous sums. The crowd about the "Lion" and on the bridge now gets very dense. Boats on the water are scattered about in apparently hopeless confusion, and presently the crew of an eight is seen to embark for the first heat of the Grand Challenge. They are slowly turned above the bridge, and paddling down through the arches they pass on, picking their way along the course, with frequent stops, to the starting point. They are very quickly followed by their antagonists, and the umpire's boat with warning whistle steams slowly down to the island; but still the crowd of floating spectators seems in hopeless confusion. The Conservancy men, with red flags in their boats, go to work in earnest, whilst gradually the floating masses sort themselves together, and



The Starting Point, Henley Regatta.



range alongside of the moored house-boats and launches. Still, as each train arrives, or as a fresh batch of boats escapes through Marsh Lock, more and more happy boatfuls come straggling down on to the course, when bang goes the gun for the start, and with redoubled energy the Conservancy men row up the stream, clearing the water as they go, and gradually driving, like sheep dogs, the straying herds of boats towards the Oxford shore.

Nothing much is seen of the two eights at first ; the umpire's steamer and the thick bunch of runners along the tow-path alone indicate their whereabouts. But in the meantime all sorts of opinions are freely given as to the probable results of the race ; how it is a certainty for one on account of the station, or else that the shelter of the willows which favours the Bucks side will more than compensate for the advantages of the other shore, and in consequence we shall see a "rattling good race." Those of the spectators who have field-glasses begin very soon to declare which boat is leading, but much reliance can seldom be placed on these remarks, as it is impossible with three-quarters of a mile of foreshortening perspective, to judge correctly of a few yards' lead. It is not long, however, before the shouts from the runners on the banks grow more and more audible, and are taken up by the spectators in the boats on the other side ; in a few seconds more two long lines of straining bodies dart past, the boats themselves seeming to lift and bound at each stroke in regular cadence. The race is generally pretty well decided as *Phillis Court* is passed, as anything like a lead here is seldom again lost. Amidst the roar of cheers and the swell from the umpire's boat the sound of the band is heard playing the well-known air, and the first heat is lost and won.

Directly the racing boats have passed, the course is rapidly covered again by boats of every description: there are gigs, skiffs, wherries, stout oak sailing-boats, canoes and punts; there are boats manned or "girled" by fancy crews, sometimes consisting of four pretty little girls in blue sailor dresses, or a set of boys, double-banked, in man-of-war costume. Fashion in the matter of hats alters every year; at the last Regatta (1880) Basque bonnets of every colour were much in vogue. There was also a sort of gondola, with a real Italian in sailor costume, who managed his oar beautifully, and kept the boat going gracefully amongst the crowd. A large family boat, with Paterfamilias and hampers in the stern, and young Hopeful in the bows with a hitcher, generally forms the centre of one of the tangled floating clusters which are perpetually seen throughout the day. On every side the cry is "Look ahead, sir." Speed of any sort is quite impossible, and the perpetual shipping and unshipping of oars must be very irksome and aggravating. Here my dear old punt comes out finely; she can be gently poled along either backwards or forwards, standing at the head or stern, Oxford fashion, and thus steered with the minutest accuracy: if you wish to pass quickly up or down the course it is best to slip between the line of moored launches, as behind them the water is comparatively clear from obstructives.

People in rowing boats, as a rule, are rather inclined to take affront at being passed by a punt, whilst they themselves are drifting helplessly with unshipped oars; but if you are careful not to bump them, they can do little but scowl at you as you pass. Some allowance, too, must be made for their feelings, as the perpetual fouling they encounter, cannot fail to affect the

tempers of even the most amiable. Later on in the day, when they have become more accustomed to the process, and have had their luncheons, they get more disposed to take the little annoyances with good nature.

Many floating parties take up permanent stations alongside a friendly house-boat or launch, and great numbers find their way down to the willow-fringed meadows of Fawley, where, if the day is fine, at two o'clock may be seen one long string of confluent picnics, a little harassed by the haymakers, photographers, gipsies, &c., but otherwise as happy and lively as possible. Hospitality is so great on these days, that with me the only difficulty is to avoid the certain after-headache which results from partaking too frequently or too freely of the cups and drinks of all sorts which are offered you by everyone. House-boats are particularly convenient at the Regatta ; they accommodate a large party, and afford a sense of security from the rain, which on one of the days is a well-known proverbial certainty. No place can be better than the roof of a house-boat for seeing the racing from, and with a good lunch below, a pleasant party, and a boat or two in which to move about occasionally, in my opinion the house-boat affords quite the best means of enjoying the day to perfection. A steam-launch is not quite as convenient, but of course it has the advantage of being able to move off and return home quickly in the evening. I do not object to plenty of these launches at the Regatta, as they are not then either smoking or raising swell. Their size and variety in the long line of moored craft form, too, a very important feature in the composition of the whole scene from an artistic point of view.

The lawn in front of Phillis Court is generally filled with

plenty of spectators;* this is especially the place for local fashion. Here ladies and gentlemen promenade up and down, or sit beneath the shade of the noble chestnut trees; they do not as a rule, care or know much about the racing itself, and even if they did, the situation is a little too much in the rear to see the contending boats well, as they go by.

The attractions of the place are its exclusive character, and the freedom there is of moving about in the shade, and meeting one's friends. This pretty river terrace, with its trees, and the stately ladies and gentlemen, forms an agreeable contrast to the general omnium gatherum, giving a tone and dignity to the gay surroundings. Several picnic parties, to which permission has been granted, may be seen under the elm trees by the fish-pond. The picturesque groups in this part of the grounds always strongly remind me of Watteau's charming compositions; the trees here have all the tall gracefulness that Watteau loved so much, and if only a few statues were hereabouts, the resemblance would be perfect.

I admire very much the contrast of stone figures amongst the living, a contrast Watteau so often made good use of, and think no large garden or shrubbery should be without sculpture of some sort—not marble or terra cotta, however, as the one stares out so very white, and the other resists the weather stains too much; any common grey stone that takes kindly to the effects of time is best, the art being rather of minor importance. Numbers of statues suitable for gardens could be had cheap enough, which at present are wasting their sweetness in the desert and smoky air of the New Road. To give proper effect to

* I am sorry to say that for some reason, at the last two Regattas the lawn at Phillis Court was quite deserted.

garden sculpture, the pedestals ought to be large, and elaborated with ornament. The French style of fountain, so frequent in Watteau's pictures, is very effective, the jets of water coming from heavy groups of sculpture at the back, the receiving basin being only a half circle.

Lunch being over, people resume their programmes, and the races are again regarded with interest—the heats for the diamond sculls, in which there is generally rather more personal interest felt, attracting great attention. The speed in these contests seems of course comparatively slow after the eights and fours, the competitors usually straggling up one after another in rather erratic courses, the men by the time the dreaded poplar corner is reached often appearing much exhausted. The whole way along they are shouted at, and cheered on, in a much more personal fashion than in the other races ; each is addressed by name, and every variety of advice and encouragement is bestowed on them by their respective friends and admirers. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon the crowd on the water is at its extreme height ; itinerant fruit-sellers come floating past in rotten old boats, seeking a market for their goods. Where do these wonderful apricots, grapes, greengages and cherries come from, and who is it that buys them ? This will ever be a mystery to me. Then there are minstrels, impromptu singers, and of course the ubiquitous niggers. I have a weakness for these last on account of their humour, though I confess they are sometimes a little troublesome. On the river there are seldom more than two at a time to be seen, their instrument being the banjo alone ; their get-up is excessively comic. I have seen two in a small flat-bottomed boat which they had rigged like a brig, with masts and yards

covered with small flags and Japanese lanterns, flower-pots of artificial flowers placed on the deck, and the men seated opposite to one another; the effect was irresistibly comic as they paddled about amongst the launches and house-boats.

If tired of stopping in one place, it is amusing at times to punt up to the bridge to see the crowds, to hear the band play, and view the Grand Stand with its patient occupants seated in demure rows. At one corner of the Stand, on a red cloth, are displayed the large silver goblets and cups which are distributed to the victors at the close of the second day. It is next to impossible to distinguish a friend on the shore when you yourself are afloat, and I am constantly being told after the Regatta that I was seen and hailed by friends on the bank of whose presence I was utterly unaware; it is, therefore, as well now and then to land and go a little around among the carriages on the bridge, by the Stand, or down the tow-path. This latter place is never pleasant to me on account of the smell of the turf, especially if it has rained at all; grass under a crowd on a hot damp day gives out an odour which mixes very unpleasantly with the various smells of the crowd itself, and which seems to haunt your nose for a day or two after.

I received a few weeks ago a letter from my American friend, W. D. Morgan, in which he describes a Regatta in the States, which he visited. The chief contest was between the two American Universities, Yale and Harvard, and my friend, who was educated at Yale, was very pleased by its winning; but what I think will interest my readers is contained in the following extract:—"The race is on the river Thames above New London, and for the whole length of the course, four miles, a railway runs close along the western bank. A special train

is arranged with open carriages, each car having a tier of seats one above the other like a theatre, facing sideways towards the river, and covered with an awning, and then the whole train goes up to the starting point, and steams down with the boats, regulating its speed by theirs. They call it a moving Grand Stand, and you really see the whole thing from beginning to end. There were twenty-three cars packed with the members of both Universities and their friends, all the ladies with ribbons, scarfs, or parasols of crimson or blue, and flags without end. If you can imagine a crowd a quarter of a mile long, cheering, shouting, and singing as they steamed along, you will get some notion from my rather indistinct description." We have not been above taking hints from our American cousins about boat-racing, in the matter of steering, sliding seats, &c. Could not some arrangement be made by which the umpire might be carried along the tow-path on a raised vehicle by a couple of good horses, and thus do away with the nuisance of the steam launch ?

In consequence of the great number of trial heats, the racing on the first day is seldom over till late in the evening ; some time however before the last one or two heats, people from town begin to leave the river, and there is a pretty steady stream to the railway going on all the time, from five till eight or nine o'clock. The town on the evening of the first day is quiet enough, at least as far as the rowing men are concerned, as they are mostly in strict training, and have to keep quiet for the second and final struggles. The course looks very pretty in the summer twilight ; the glimmering lights along the line of moored launches, and boat sleeping parties, together with the broken line of the houses of the old town, the church tower, the

bridge, and the trees at Phillis Court, giving the river a wonderfully romantic and beautiful appearance.

The town soon quiets down for the night's rest, and stirs itself betimes in the morning for the final races. The crews go off along the tow-path in batches for their morning's swim, and with towels in their hands, are seen returning ready for their breakfasts.

As the programme for the second day has much fewer events on it to be decided, the races do not generally commence till one o'clock. As long as I can remember, the chief contests at Henley have been the following :—the Grand Challenge Plate, the Stewards' Challenge Plate, the Visitors' Challenge Plate, the Thames Challenge Plate, the Ladies' Challenge Plate, the Silver Goblets, the Wyfold Challenge Plate, the Diamond Sculls, and Town Plate.

Many boats unfortunately get out of the whole competition on the first day, and the results of the second day's racing are often foregone conclusions, a great deal depending on the station of the boats, and the set of the wind ; the form and style of the competitors is also well known from their performances on the first day. Occasionally however Greek meets Greek, when there ensues the greatest excitement ; in the year '78, this was the case in the sculling match, between an American and an English champion ; it was one of the closest affairs I have ever seen. There were two American crews that year, a very fine set of men, with admirable physique, but lacking the polish and training which our men get from their careful coaching. At the last Regatta there was also a German crew, members of a Frankfort rowing club, who looked as if in another year they might give more trouble to beat. I was a little sorry that these foreign

crews did not receive more hearty cheers from the crowd, but the English crowd is always very national, possessing little apparent sympathy with the foreigner. At Henley our rowing clubs were polite and generous enough to the strangers, but the masses at the Regatta lacked the feelings of courteousness which are due to the stranger ; they wished to see fair play done, but further than that they did not go. There was in the sort of extra cheering which arose when the English crews won, something grating on the sensitive ear. The rough crowds at Hammersmith are far worse in this respect, and when the Americans contested the race there, I was disgusted to hear the Atalanta crew positively hissed at as it rowed by, some distance to the bad. On the same day I was insulted several times for wearing their colours.

One of the two Regatta days they say is sure to be a wet one. I have known both days fine, but it is rather remarkable when this happens. Curiously enough, in the year '79, which will so long be remembered for its incessant bad weather, the two Regatta days were dry ones ; the river was, however, in high flood, and not pleasant for either spectators or competitors.

When the rain comes on badly it is amusing to see the various expedients that are resorted to in order to keep dry, the groups in the boats assuming all sorts of odd shapes and costumes. Ladies in their summer dresses are in a miserable plight. An open boat is a wretched thing in the rain ; waterproofs smell, umbrellas are in the way, the shelter of the trees and willows is very temporary, the banks get terribly muddy, and the prospect of going home in the train in a damp condition is most dispiriting. I recommend a large carriage umbrella for a boat as about the best thing I know, and plenty of Scotch

shawls should be taken, as they are never out of place at the Regatta ; even in fine weather they are useful to spread on the grass at lunch time.

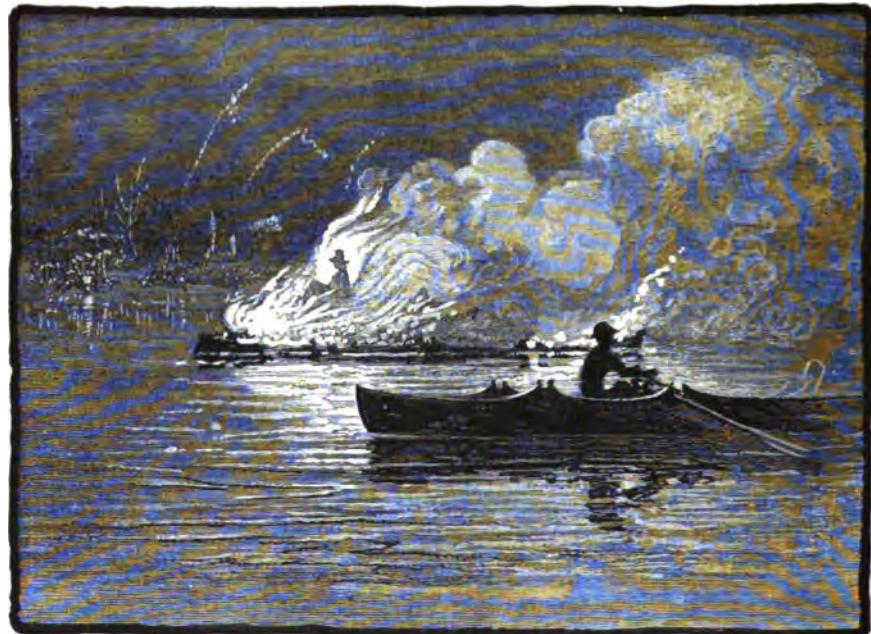
In the year '77, on the afternoon of the Regatta, I remember having punted Mrs. Schwabe down to her house at Mill End, and just as I had finished a cup of tea there, the rain began with a will. I prepared to return to the race-course, but as it seemed as though the rain might be only temporary, concluded to wait, and so remained lying down in my punt in the snug boat-house. I was there for two hours, and beguiled the time by smoking, and watching the returning parties draggling along towards Hambledon Lock. I saw nothing of the last races, but I kept dry, and just as I had made up my mind to wait no longer it fortunately ceased raining. As I returned up the deserted course a steamy mist rose up from the surface of the water, twilight commenced to invest the cosy camp fires on the islands with interest, the tow-path had not a soul on it, and the waters were broad and clear of moving boats. The contrast to the scene as I had left it in the afternoon was most striking.

A good deal of noisy fun still goes on amongst the boating crews during the second night, but it is generally of a harmless sort, and the following day most of the rowing men are off early, as there is a Regatta held at Marlow, which they attend on their way home. Henley looks very deserted by noon on the day after the Regatta ; on the river, numbers of floating champagne bottles, straw bottle-cases, bits of paper, and the trodden-down banks, tell their own tale. Already the boat-carts of Salter and Messenger are seen loading up, the Grand Stand is taken down, and Henley resumes once more its ordinary quiet, sleepy character. Later on in the year, generally towards the end of

August, a Town and Watermen's Regatta takes place, occupying two days. These races are of little beyond local interest. The first day young men of the neighbourhood contend in pair, four-oared, and sculling races, over a much shorter course than the one from the island to the bridge. The watermen's races on the second day are much more amusing, ending with double punting matches, and greasy-pole business late in the evening. When some companies of Royal Engineers were camped at Henley one year, they took part in this Regatta, having a race in their great clumsy pontoons. The punting races are rather rough affairs, and as fouling is allowed, they do not really afford much criterion of speed. The course is from the "Lion" lawn, down the river, round a pole off the timber wharf, and back to the bridge. Six boats start off very rapidly and regularly at first, the scrimmage not beginning until the punts turn at the pole, when those still on the down journey, inevitably run foul of those turning, the most approved method of proceeding being for one of the men to hold on by the edge of a rival's boat, and thus prevent its passing. Of course the men get knocked repeatedly overboard, and lose their poles; often a punt is left with only one man in it, and sometimes with none at all, the race being frequently won by those whose chance at first seemed hopeless, for by waiting behind until the other boats are in deadly tussle, they then slip by and come in easy victors. The men enjoy the fun very much, and after the race is over, jump overboard and play about in and out of the water, like the otters or seals at the Zoological Gardens. The duck or pig hunts which conclude the day are rather a farce, so far as any skill is concerned, but they amuse the crowds on the bridge enormously. It seems a little hard on the duck or pig, but still I like these

old rough English games, as they are remnants of the olden times, and have a pleasant connection in my mind with that dear old book, Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes of the People of England."

One other event takes place at Henley, on the river, for on



The Fifth of November at Henley.

the fifth of November the watermen get up a subscription for a nautical Guy Fawkes. A very grotesque figure of some objectionable character is dressed up and trimmed for conflagration ; he is moored on the river, in an old boat, and set fire to, and illumines the bank on either side.

Last year the "Guy" consisted of a puffy-legged effigy of Mr. Parnell, which was carried about the town by men dressed

in Irish costume, and wearing devils' masks. At seven o'clock in the evening the crowd on the bridge and along the tow-path was very dense, waiting for the conflagration; the time was beguiled by squibs, crackers and fireballs amongst the boys on the tow-path, but as no signs of the "Guy" appeared there was a good deal of impatience, and it was found that the boat containing the effigy had drifted from its moorings and escaped down stream. A "Guy Fawkes hunt" with boats took place, and about eight o'clock the missing figure was brought back, and having been ignited, rapidly lit up the scene with a lurid glow; poor Mr. Parnell sat for some time on a tar barrel quite unmoved, but shortly after his legs commenced to burn, and in a few moments when he was well alight he rolled over-board, and drifted slowly down stream, burning as he floated along.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE PUNT.—MISCONCEPTIONS WITH REGARD TO PUNTS.—ADVANTAGES OVER A ROWING BOAT.—CANOES.—DRAWBACKS TO THE PUNT.—DIFFICULTY OF LEARNING.—ADVICE TO BEGINNERS.—SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED.—CHOOSING A PUNT AND PUNT-POLE.—THE SAIL.—A PUNT LOAD OF ACADEMICIANS.—STYLES OF PUNTING.—MUD, WIND, AND WEEDS.—FLOTSAM AND JETSAM.—OLD BOOTS.—FISH WHEELS.—RECOVERY OF GOODS FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER.—MUSSELS.—INACCURACY OF PUNTS IN PICTURES.



PROPOSE in this Chapter to enlarge a little on the characteristics and advantages belonging to the Thames punt. A great deal of misconception exists in the public mind with regard to this boat, as to the difficulty of working it, its speed, comfort, and peculiar handiness ; I feel quite sure if its beauties were better known, we

should see a great many more punts used as pleasure boats than is at present the case. Punts are found in every part of the river above Richmond, though as they are chiefly used for fishing purposes, it is not easy at most places to obtain them on

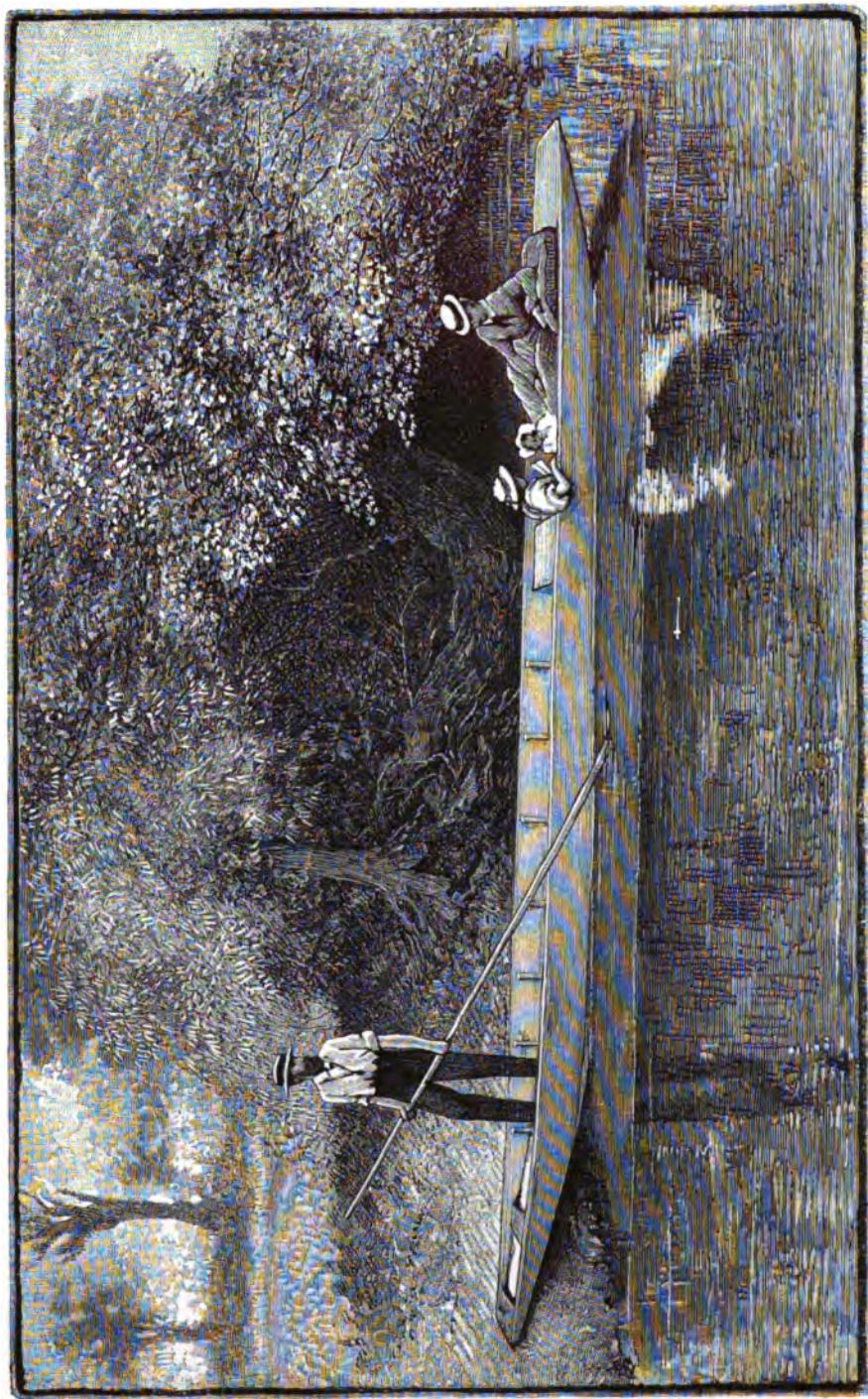
hire for one's own management. At Maidenhead, however, where quite the best punts on the river are built, one can generally be had with mattress and good poles, fit for a party of two ladies and a gentleman, and I should advise a first acquaintance with the boat to be made at this place.

The first thing that strikes one about a punt, when seen lying beside an ordinary rowing boat, is its extreme simplicity both of construction and propelling power, and the first thing that strikes those who try one, is the great ease with which it is turned about; this capability of turning short and quickly, though embarrassing to a beginner, is in reality one of the greatest advantages of the boat, enabling a skilful navigator to steer with the utmost nicety.

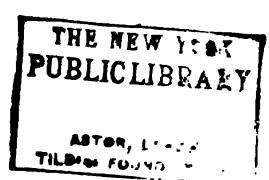
The want of speed in a punt is no disadvantage to those who, like myself, thoroughly enjoy the river, who wish not merely to travel on it, but to study and observe its various beauties in an easy leisurely way, to explore its narrow backwaters, to sketch, to bathe, or to pass the hot hours beneath the shelter of the willow boughs. Even for travelling, a punt is a first-rate boat, provided your time is not too limited; she tows as easily as most rowing boats, and her comfort and roominess allow every variety of change of attitude without tipping about, as is the case in lighter boats. If children are with you, this is a great advantage, as can well be imagined by those who know the restless character of childhood. The person who shoves a punt, has many advantages over the rower; the extreme monotony of the work of rowing, after a long spell, becomes very tedious, the hands get blistered, and the body cramped; if you are sculling without a coxswain the constant twisting your neck round to look ahead proves irksome, and if

you have a coxswain, it is ten to one that altercations will be continually arising as to errors of the steerer. Those seated in the stern are sure to direct attention to objects of interest in front of the boat, to see which the rower must screw round ; or else the rower will make observations on things that are past, which are equally troublesome for the passengers to see. Unless it can be held comfortably at a landing stage, embarking and disembarking, in a light rowing boat, are generally awkward proceedings, the narrow pointed bow not being an easy thing to assist a lady into from a river bank ; in passing a lock, the rowing boat has to relinquish its oars, and much curious and intricate work done with a hitcher. I have seen young men pulled overboard by the hitcher in locks before now, and also the hitcher pulled out of the grasp of its holder ; against the stream a rowing boat cannot take advantage of the inshore eddies, as it is always necessary to keep at oar's-length from the banks, and lastly, if any little odds or ends tumble in a rowing boat, they are very apt to roll down beneath the flooring, and are most awkward to recover. Every one of these difficulties and drawbacks which I have advanced against the rowing boat, in a punt are entirely unknown and unfelt.

The variety of the work in punting is extreme : every muscle is used in turn, no two shoves are ever alike, owing to the shifting depths, the wind, the stream, the mud and the weeds ; and as the pole not only propels the boat but steers it at the same time, each shove requires a large amount of thought and skill, which entirely prevents the feeling of weariness occasioned by mere mechanical work. Then, as the punter stands up to his work, his body is never cramped, and the pole does not blister the hands of even a beginner. The punter can see not only in



The Author's Punt.



front but on all sides, and what is better still, down into the water itself. He is in perfect accord with his passengers ; they lie luxuriously stretched on a comfortable mattress, and get no bullying for bad steering, or for untrimming the boat by moving about ; what they see he can see, and if he wants them to see things that are behind, he can turn the boat in an instant, thus saving them the trouble of screwing their necks ; if they wish to pick flowers, their end of the punt is easily brushed against the bank, to which they can stretch out over the edge of the boat without the slightest tipping or danger. In embarking or disembarking nothing can be simpler, when the end of the punt is run up on to a sloping bank ; even ladies or children can walk quietly on board without any assistance ; the boat holds itself when run ashore thus, but when the passengers reach the stern seat, their weight releases the head, and the punt floats gently off. Again, in passing a lock, everything is in favour of the punt ; her sides are flat and without any projecting encumbrances to catch in ledges or the planking ; the motive power is never relinquished, as in the case of oars, for the pole is used all through, and when the gates are opened, the boat goes out at once without let or hindrance. Indeed, a punt need not touch the sides of a lock at all, but can be held perfectly stationary in the centre, by the mere adjustment of the pole. In my punt, I can, if I choose, pass out of a lock long before any rowing boats that are in it (unless indeed there is a very large crowd of them), by means of this power of floating in the centre detached from, and independent of, the sides. As I may have been the last to enter the lock, it generally rather aggravates the others to find, on emerging themselves, that I have already obtained a hundred yards' start. In punting against the stream, the banks

are hugged persistently by a punt, every eddy being taken full advantage of; in places where the stream is very swift, a rowing boat can in consequence hardly pass a punt in going up the river. And lastly, things of any description (such as threepenny bits, so useful in lock passing) that fall in a punt are recovered without the slightest difficulty, as the floor is flat, and the britten boards can be lifted separately and without trouble. Many of the above advantages of the punt belong also to the canoe, but the great drawback to this boat on the Thames is its smallness and unsociability (an endeavour to get over this last objection is made by the plan of two or three canoes travelling in company). The monotony of the exercise is almost as great in a canoe as in a rowing boat; canoes have, it is true, the advantages of passing up narrow backwaters and going easily through locks, but punts can do these things as well; in a narrow stream a punt passes very easily, as she draws only a few inches of water, and requires no more than her width to navigate her. The canoe certainly possesses one great advantage over both rowing boats and punts, and that is its ability to travel up rivers where there are no locks, and where navigation for larger boats is liable to be stopped every now and then.*

There are of course some drawbacks to the use of a punt which I should feel it unfair to suppress. One of the chief of these is want of speed; where a long distance has to be covered in a limited time, punts of course cannot compete with rowing boats, but these again in their turn have to give way in the matter of speed to the steam-launch, the launch itself being in turn beaten by the Great Western Railway; but if true enjoy-

* Smokers will understand my predilection for the punt, when I compare the rowing boat to a cigar, the canoe to a cigarette, but the punt to a pipe.

ment of the river is the main object, time not having to be considered, there is no boat superior in comfort and convenience to a punt. The difficulty of learning the management of a punt-pole prevents a great many from taking to punts ; it is certainly some time before the art becomes easy and natural. It was not until my third year that I began to feel quite at home in it, and even now I am continually improving in style, and learning fresh delicate manœuvres every year ; still it does not take long to master the first simple principles, a week or two of steady practice being quite sufficient for this purpose. Many people having, in front of an amused audience, made an unsuccessful first attempt, are so vexed and annoyed, that they avoid the punt ever after. The advice I should give to anyone desirous of acquiring the art is to choose a quiet day with little wind, in a retired backwater, where no people can see you, where the bottom is gravelly (such a place can be found at Taplow, behind the eyots on the Bucks side), and there try to make the punt go as straight as you can against the stream. Endeavour to do this by shoves from one side of the boat only ; above all things take it easy and push very gently, the proper moderation of the motive power being almost the only thing necessary to learn. Do not get flurried if the boat swings violently round, or runs into the bank, but quietly and gently coax her back again. A punt is in many respects like a young horse ; if she finds out that you are nervous and excited in your motions you will have great difficulty, but if you keep cool and gentle with her, she will become most tractable. Mine I sometimes think seems to know exactly of her own accord which way I want her to go, little more than a strong wish being on my part quite sufficient to influence her direction ; the very sensitiveness of

the punt to turn on the slightest provocation, as I said before, becoming the quality of all others for which I love her so much.

Do not at first get too much up in the head of the punt, as this is the part to tip over from ; hold the pole like a billiard cue, lightly in the hand ; avoid carrying it bodily up the boat after a shove, as this tires you quite unnecessarily. The proper way is merely to carry the pole back, with the fingers of one hand loosely holding the thin end, allowing the other to trail along in the water, which will thus bear the main weight. One last piece of advice, which is that in case your pole, by getting underneath the boat in a strong stream, should have a tendency to pull you overboard, by all means avoid a ducking by letting go of the pole. After a very little practice you will soon find out that punting is by no means a violent or hard exercise ; it requires no great strength to take a punt about anywhere. I know one or two ladies who are quite experts in the art, and have often seen little bits of boys or girls cross and recross the river with the utmost ease in great heavy fishermen's punts ; at Maidenhead there was a man with only one leg and a crutch who could punt perfectly.

After mastering the art of propelling the boat in a straight direction with the pole, there still remains a very great deal to be learnt, as, for instance, how to work against a head wind, with a side wind, over deep water, or soft mud ; how to decide which side of the river is best adapted for punting, by the look of the banks or from the sort of plants growing on them ; where to expect deep water and where shallow, strong stream or friendly eddies : the eye of an experienced punter

detects most of these contingencies afar off, and regulates his boat accordingly. By an intimate knowledge of the habits of the river, in general he is enabled to navigate his punt over parts that he has to cross for the first time, taking especial care in this last case to look out for sunken stumps or snags. It would be impossible for me in a work of this description to give so complete a set of instructions as would render it a regular punter's guide or handbook, and I think as there is nothing but pleasure to be found in learning the various mysteries of the art, it is far better to leave them for such of my readers as may be induced to try the punt-pole, to be acquired by themselves with diligent practice.

In choosing or purchasing a punt, if a second-hand one, its youth and strength can be best judged of by standing on the extreme part of either end, with the feet stretched out wide apart, one on each side of the boat, and then giving it a sort of shake ; if it is new and strong it will feel rigid and firm under this ordeal, but if old it will "wobble," as if it were made of wicker-work ; the different degrees of shakiness it exhibits indicating its age and the care that has been taken of it. If the punt is not a thoroughly well built one it will "wobble" very much under this trial, even when brand-new. In order to be quite sure of getting a first-rate punt, by all means go to Maidenhead for one, as most of those I have seen built elsewhere are very inferior, the worst of all coming from Richmond and Surbiton ; these last are beautifully finished in their workmanship, but their models are detestable for shoving purposes ; when I meet with these down-river boats anywhere I can tell them in an instant. I have, I believe, mentioned before that I have no locks or hinges in my boat ; the charm of a punt is its

simplicity, and all fittings and hooks and hinges and iron-work in general are best out of it. Hinges never work, locks never fit after the first year, hooks and little cleats, &c. sticking out of the sides catch and tear things. For a mere pleasure excursion of a few hours the mattress and punt-pole ought to be all that are wanted on a journey. I carry a mast for towing, with a movable thwart for it, and a large sail ; I hold the sheet in my hand when sailing, and steer with the pole. A punt scoop and sponge will be found very handy ; the scoop will serve to bale with after rain, or can be used in washing the floor, and the sponge will take out every bit of dirt with great ease. A punt should always be cleaned with the scoop and sponge if you wish her to look nice, as the mops and tin bowls of the watermen scratch the varnish and paint, and leave all the stones and dirt in the corners.

In choosing a pole for summer use, provided it is very stiff, it cannot be too light. I do not myself care about its being very long, as deep water can easily be avoided if you wish ; the wood should have a dark reddish look, indicating that it has been well seasoned with its bark on. A much stronger and longer pole should also be procured for bad weather, the iron on which should be considerably heavier ; the iron will last for a very long time. I used one for eight or nine years, until the prongs were worn almost to nothing, and then had two new pieces welded on by a village blacksmith, which rendered the iron as good as new. A couple of rypecks are also necessary for mooring the punt ; but I seldom take these with me, unless I purpose sketching, as they take up room. I never saw any other punt but mine with a sail ; but I find it very useful, especially when travelling, and by using the lee-board when the wind is across

the river, a punt sails even better than a rowing boat. One of the britten boards from the floor of the punt answers every purpose ; it can be easily held with one hand by a person seated beside the mast. As long as the lee-board is doing good, it is pressed firmly against the side of the punt by the pressure of

*Punt Sailing with the Stream.*

the water, and the instant the wind shifts to fair, the lee-board floats away from the side, and can be taken out.

One of the greatest difficulties I find in my adoption of the punt for river excursions is to meet with friends sufficiently acquainted with the use of the pole to accompany me up the river. Those I have induced to travel with me on these occasions have usually been good-natured enough to do their share of the work in tracking ; but I am not fond of asking them to perform this labour, as it reminds me a little of the man who said he had worked his passage up the Erie Canal, and on being

questioned as to the nature of his work, replied that he led the horse.

A decided drawback to the punt is the fact that she will not comfortably carry more than three people, the punter and two passengers. Of course a much larger number can be taken for short distances ; but it is not an easy matter, when loaded heavily, to navigate the punt successfully. On one occasion I took seven members of the Royal Academy, including the present President, from Maidenhead to Bray and back ; but it was a very heavy load, and I once or twice contemplated the advisability of creating a few vacancies by upsetting the boat. Of course, when the main body of the boat is occupied by passengers, the pole has to be used from a fixed point, the steering being accomplished by skilful wrist-work, or by shifting the shove from side to side. There is another style of punting, much used at Oxford for light punts, which is done by standing in the stern, or on the till, and pricking the boat along, the steering being effected by the direction given to the pole. This method looks very pretty, and if the passengers are placed in front of the well, a punt thus propelled much resembles a gondola ; but it will be found in an ordinarily heavy punt very laborious and tiring after a bit, as the arms have to do the work almost alone, without much aid from the mere weight of the body ; it is, however, admirably adapted for short distances, or through any little intricate backwaters. I have found it very useful at the Regattas, as the steering can be accomplished with the greatest nicety.

A novice will find it necessary to roll up his sleeves above the elbows, to prevent them from getting wet with the drips from the punt pole ; but as soon as he learns to keep his hands

low in working, the drips will no longer trouble him, and his cuffs will remain perfectly dry. It is very desirable in learning to be careful to practise punting on either side of the boat, or else after a while the work on one side will be found much easier than on the other, so that when it becomes necessary to hug the bank on the side you are weakest in your work, a good deal of inconvenience will result. It is better in shoving, to put little weight on the pole until the nature of the ground is made sure of, as in case of soft mud the pole will run in so far, and stick so firm, that it will be almost sure to slip through your hands, and be left sticking in the mud some distance behind the boat.

In choosing the side along which to shove, there is no fixed rule ; but in general on the convex bank less stream will be met with than on the concave. Considerable judgment and knowledge of the water is necessary to know precisely where to cross over ; when the bank is low and flat, and the edges fringed with sedges, mud is certain to be found, as is the case also where floating persicaria or water-lilies are seen, whilst round rushes and steep cliff banks generally indicate that the bottom is gravelly, and the stream swift. In punting up the river, with a strong wind across the stream, should the bottom be hard, the lee-shore will be the best to take ; but if the lee-shore is muddy or encumbered with bushes along its banks, the windward or sheltered side is to be preferred. If the wind and stream are both ahead, by all means punt on the side where the bottom is hardest, and hug the bank with the most careful persistency, taking great pains with every shove, as if once the nose of the punt gets turned out into the stream, you will find yourself going round and round in the middle of the river in no time.

A punt is of all boats the one in which you are most likely to meet with, and pick up, a great variety of waifs and strays, or flotsam and jetsam. Anything unusual in the water catches the eye of the punter very quickly. He can check the way of his boat in an instant, and pick up what he chooses. I remember thus finding a lady's black velvet jacket, amongst a clump of rushes. It was a very nice one and nearly new. I gave it to one of my servants, who was much pleased with it, as after being dried and smoothed it looked remarkably well. I have picked out one or two umbrellas—more or less done for—several rudders, a good punt pole, many hitchers, bits of board, and other things; sometimes the brands on these have enabled me to return them to their owners. Once I picked up a large Notice to Trespassers board, floating amongst the weeds, but though the name of its proprietor was on it, I kept it as a trophy, on account of the dislike I have to these eyesores on the river. Mrs. Copeland eventually made firewood of it. Bottles are very common on the river, especially in the summer time, but still commoner are the corks, as these never sink; it is marvellous how they accumulate. Below any large town, all along the slack waters and eddies you might pick them up by the bushel. If they are worth anything, as I suppose they are, I cannot see why the riverside men do not go along and collect them; great numbers are particularly noticeable just below Reading.

When at Mrs. Copeland's I used to supply her with plenty of firewood, enough to last her all the winter; for in my punt on my return home of an evening I generally had a nice pile of bits of wood, picked up here and there, often quite large pieces, and these when dried burnt finely. A great harvest

of wood blocks could always be found where bankside building was going on ; any nice pieces floating away down stream becoming my prizes.

More than once I have brought up out of the water an old boot or shoe, pierced through by my punt pole. I am fond of studying old boots, and love to speculate on the characters and stations in life of their former proprietors. There is nothing like leather for lasting a long time, even under the water. I remember seeing a dried-up pond, near Petworth in Sussex, on the bottom of which there must have been at least twenty or thirty old boots. It quite beat all my ingenuity to account for this curious collection ; the boots were of all sizes and sorts, and I thought possibly some unfortunate second-hand boot-seller might have drowned himself in the pond, after first having cast in his stock-in-trade. But the most probable theory may be that as the pond was a good way from any town, beside a tedious and hilly road, and the only piece of water thereabouts, footsore and weary tramps might be in the habit of halting there, and after cooling their feet in the water, make up their minds to discard their ill-fitting boots as worse than nothing.

That tramps do discard their boots at times must be obvious to anyone who has remarked, in the ditches and hedges alongside of any high road, the numbers of old boots that are to be seen. I never pass one of these without looking at it, turning it over with my stick, and wondering to how many different people it may have belonged. There is the bumpkin's heavily ballasted boot, its sole riddled with nail-holes, which formed its owner's foot into a mere iron-shod hoof ; there is the boot which has seen better days, but whose showy make at last

served but to hasten the final catastrophe ; then there is the boot which has been long borne with and cherished, on account of the way it accommodated certain bunions or corns ; it has been re-soled many times, and carefully mended. Boots of this description have generally never belonged to more than one person, as they are pretty sure to have been worn to the bitter end. There are also cases of mutilated boots, where the toes have been cut away to make room for tender joints ; boots with gaping slits which tell of the agonies of gout. Mutilations sometimes occur in odd parts of the upper leather, evidently done for the sake of the material, probably to make hinges or mend something with. Lastly, I have come more than once on mere soles, all the upper parts having entirely disappeared. In the matter of foot covering some tramps must be far more fastidious than others, casting away their boots in a state that would quite shock the parsimonious feelings of many ; in consequence of which a tramp not over particular may obtain a choice of boots from the roadside gratis.

After all, boots and shoes must have a final end somewhere ; they do not make good manure unless burnt, and when rubbish is laid over a field to be dug in, the old boots remain, and turn up over and over again. An immense quantity of old boots find their way, via the dust hole and cinder heap, to the suburbs, wherever a new road is being made, where mixed with broken crockery and oyster shells they no doubt form a very good foundation.*

I could dwell on this subject much longer. To do justice to it, I ought to have formed a collection of various specimens,

* I see in the newspapers that some ingenious American has invented a process of making rum from old boots.

and given my readers illustrations of the most remarkable ; but after all the subject has not much to do with punts.

I have experienced once or twice a very unpleasant sensation by feeling my punt pole strike on something which offers at first a sort of springy resistance, and then gives way, allowing the pole to penetrate it, very suggestive of a dead body ; in reality the iron of the pole pierces what is called a "wheel," a sort of basket trap for fish. It is a freshwater cousin to the marine lobster-pot ; stones are tied on it to sink it, while to enable the fisherman to find it again a rush is attached, the small end to the basket and the root part floating just out of the water. When you see a rush thus, with its white end just above the water, you may be pretty sure that a wheel is below. I am sorry when I make a hole in one of these wheels, as it injures them very much. In punting up to a landing where fishermen keep their punts, it is as well to look out for these things on the bottom ; there are generally several about, as the men keep baits in them.

Another frequent occurrence is to bring up a lucky flint-stone on the pole, a prong of which has by chance penetrated the hole. This event I am superstitious enough to consider as an omen of good luck ; old kettles and tin pots come up too sometimes, and from the soft mud the pole constantly sets free enormous quantities of gas, some sort of carburetted hydrogen, I suppose, though there is never any smell attached to it that I can perceive.

In locks, a great deal of money no doubt goes to the bottom, and I believe the lock-keepers occasionally do a little successful dredging. I never picked up any money from the bottom. I once dropped a gold locket overboard, but recovered it easily, as

the water was not deep. The most difficult thing to recover, even in shallow water, is a sponge ; it sinks very easily, rolling over and over with the stream, and being so very much the colour of the bottom of the river, that it can hardly be distinguished at all. In cleaning out a punt this should always be borne in mind, and the sponge held securely. Last year (1879) a gentleman lost a gold watch, chain, and two lockets, overboard, close by Magpie Eyot ; the river was flooded at the time. The fisherman who was with him took his observations of the place, and this year the river being very low indeed about the end of August, the man thought he would go and have a look for the watch ; he came to the spot, the greater part of the bottom of the river was exposed, and in a very short time he found the watch and chain lying on the stones, where it had been for more than a year ; the watch looked quite uninjured, but the water had got into one of the lockets. I believe the watch has been returned safely, as the fisherman had the address of its owner.

On the same day that the watch was found, the lowness of the water between Hambledon and Medmenham afforded me an opportunity of observing the habits of the freshwater mussels ; great numbers of these could be seen wherever the bottom was sandy and smooth. My attention was first attracted by noticing here and there on the smooth bottom a great many curling and zigzagging lines which looked exactly as if done by some one with a walking-stick (as in the sands at low tide by the sea-shore when people have been writing their names), but I soon discovered these marks were not from the hand of man, and on examination I perceived a mussel at the end of each line. When I stopped and watched them closely, I found that every half minute the creatures moved forwards about an inch ; they were

set in the mud, with the narrow edges of their shells downwards, the short end of the upper part, where the hinge is, was forward, and when they moved they gave a sort of lifting heave. Occasionally two met one another head to head, when one had to give way ; whenever a dead leaf or weed crossed their path, they protruded a sort of whitish-looking tongue, and no doubt fed themselves ; a few got over on their sides, but only remained so for long when engaged in feeding ; every now and then they emitted a little current of water, which dispersed the mud and sand behind them. Some had been left high and dry by the falling of the water, and even these, if the mud was still soft, could move along at intervals. I saw plenty of others where the bottom was stony, but these mostly lay on their sides, with their white tongues out. As the mode of progression which those in the mud made use of would be out of the question amongst the stones, I suppose they lay thus on their sides and trusted to the stream rolling bits of weeds over them, to catch which they kept their tongues out.*

On the occasion of this lowness in the water, a curious thing

* My nephew, who has studied these creatures very particularly, and who presented to the Hartley Institution at Southampton a very complete collection of their shells, informs me I am wrong about the long tongue of the mussels ; it is really their foot, and has nothing to do with their feeding. The mussels have no mouths proper, but take in the water through their gills, and after having absorbed any nourishment in the way of dead weeds or leaves, discharge the water in a purified state. My nephew tells me there are only three of the larger sorts of mussels found in the upper Thames—the swollen mussel, the painter's mussel, and the swan mussel. The first two are the commonest, have thicker shells, and are found chiefly in the main streams ; the swan mussel is larger and flatter, and found in muddy backwaters ; the numerous empty shells are those probably of ones that have died naturally and have then been cleaned out by water-snails, most of which are carnivorous to a certain extent. The mussels I saw and have described, were no doubt the painter's mussel, so-called on account of the shells being used in Germany by painters to hold small portions of colour.

happened with regard to the fish ; these were, I suppose, frightened from the level swims by the shallowing of the water, and had taken refuge in the deep holes here and there. In passing over one of these, my punt pole coming down amongst the refugees suddenly, produced great alarm, quantities of large roach and barbel darting out in all directions. I believe with a cast net, such as the men use for catching bait, bushels of fish might have been captured. The weeds, too, suffered a great deal from the low water, especially the sweet sedges ; the roots of these plants were all exposed, and looked like horse-radishes lying on the mud. The smaller fibres from them seemed to have very little hold of the ground, the bundles of sedges flopping over in every direction right and left ; the flags and rushes appeared to be much more firmly rooted. This lowness in the river did not arise altogether from the dry weather, though we had had three weeks of it, but on account of repairs which were going on at Marsh and Hambledon weirs, and in the evening when the bucks were closed the water rose again to its usual height.

Before I conclude this chapter, in which I have latterly strayed away from the subject of punts, I should like to make a remark on the inaccuracy there is generally seen in the punts introduced in river pictures. All boats are extremely difficult to draw well, and I suspect the artists choose the punt, as it is the easiest of representation on account of its beautiful simplicity ; but apart from invariably rendering it far too short and dumpy, they generally save all trouble by simply making the sides of the boat quite straight—a mere square box in perspective. Now in no possible view are the lines of a punt straight, the two ends in reality converging very considerably, somewhat like a

coffin, and the floor of a punt, at least of a good one, is simply the narrow segment of a large circle, and not a flat box with the ends bevelled up. Artists always make the ends too steep, and quite straight instead of curved. I remember when I was on the selecting committee of the Royal Academy, great numbers of river pieces, with punts introduced in them, passed before us, in none of which was the boat correctly drawn. I trust my brother artists will take my remarks as kindly meant, and believe me that a punt is nearly as difficult to paint as it is to punt.

CHAPTER XII.

PARTING WORDS OF ADVICE.—PLENTY OF TIME.—TRAVELLING UP VERSUS DOWN STREAM.—THE PLACES TO STOP AT.—BEAUTIES OF AUTUMN.—DOGS IN A BOAT.—DOG TROUBLES.—WELL-BRED DOGS.—CATS.—DOGS VERSUS BABIES.—PICKING WATER-LILIES.—ACCIDENTS ARISING FROM THE DARKNESS OF NIGHT.—LOCKS AT NIGHT.—ADVENTUROUS YOUNG LADIES.—DROWNING PARTIES.—STEAM LAUNCHES.—ADVICE TO A WOULD-BE LAUNCH PROPRIETOR.—MR. S. P. JACKSON.—THE "WATER-LILY."—PACKET-BOAT FROM LONDON TO OXFORD.—ADVANTAGES OF TRAVELLING SECOND-CLASS.—LADY BEACONSFIELD AND THE LINEN-DRAPER.—DANGEROUS METHOD OF LOADING BOATS.—CONCLUSION.



N THIS concluding Chapter I propose to give a few words of advice, that I think may be useful to those of my readers who may wish to enjoy the beauties of the river, and at the same time to point out one or two practices that I cannot help feeling are mistakes. In the first place I would strongly recommend those travelling in boats to give themselves plenty of time; to endeavour to run down from

Oxford to Richmond in two or three days, with any idea of enjoying the trip, seems to me a great mistake; in a journey of this description the banks glide swiftly by, producing

a sense of monotony and weariness, the hands get blistered, and the violent exercise coming, as it often does, as a sudden burst, effects more harm than good. When standing by a lock I have frequently seen parties of young men on an expedition of this sort, and judging from their looks and conversation it was quite evident the tranquillizing influence of the gentle stream was entirely lost on them. I have with very pleasant companions performed one or two such journeys, but remember that our chief enjoyment was derived from the pride of stating how far we had come or how far we intended to go. If only two or three days can be spared for the river, by far the best plan is to employ them in passing over a smaller distance, picking out a pretty bit, and endeavouring to see as much of it as possible; from Wallingford to Henley, or from Reading to Maidenhead would in my opinion for example be quite as much as could be pleasantly accomplished in three days.

In a punt the rapid journey of course becomes an impossibility. Nothing can be more enjoyable than a punting trip up to Oxford of a week or ten days, returning in rather less time; a journey about which nothing definite is fixed, made with no desire of accomplishing so many miles a day, is always by far the pleasantest, going ashore whenever there is anything worth seeing, and stopping where the evening overtakes you; there are so many good little inns on the river that if your party is a small one this can easily be done, or else the plan of camping out or sleeping in the boat may be carried out. I never tried the pleasures of camp life, but from what I have seen and heard they are very great.

In travelling up or down the river some judgment and

experience are necessary in the selection of the resting place at night. I frequently hear of parties having to go on farther than they intended on account of their inability to procure sleeping apartments : this generally arises from the propensity there is, with most people, to select the prettiest and most picturesque places on the river for the night's halt. Streatley, Sonning, Shillingford, Wargrave, or Medmenham are favourite resorts, the larger towns of Reading, Wallingford, Henley, or Maidenhead being generally neglected. Now I much prefer to stop for the night at one of the larger towns, for many reasons. In the first place, you may feel sure of getting rooms at one or other of the good hotels ; in these, if you have ladies with you, the accommodation will be found suitable. In some of the small river-side inns this is not always very good, besides which a good deal of noisy fun at night is often going on. I particularly recommend stopping at Reading for the night ; the river there is ugly and uninteresting, but at night all cats are grey, and by stopping there, the disagreeable long reach is cut in half. In the morning, very soon after starting either up or down, the scenery becomes more beautiful, whereas, if a night stop is made, either at Sonning or Pangbourne, the long, ugly Reading-reach occupies the best hours of the day in passing. The larger towns are also very convenient in case you wish to make any purchases, the newspapers can be obtained, and if a sudden run up to town is called for, or a friend has to join your party, the train service is far better and quicker.

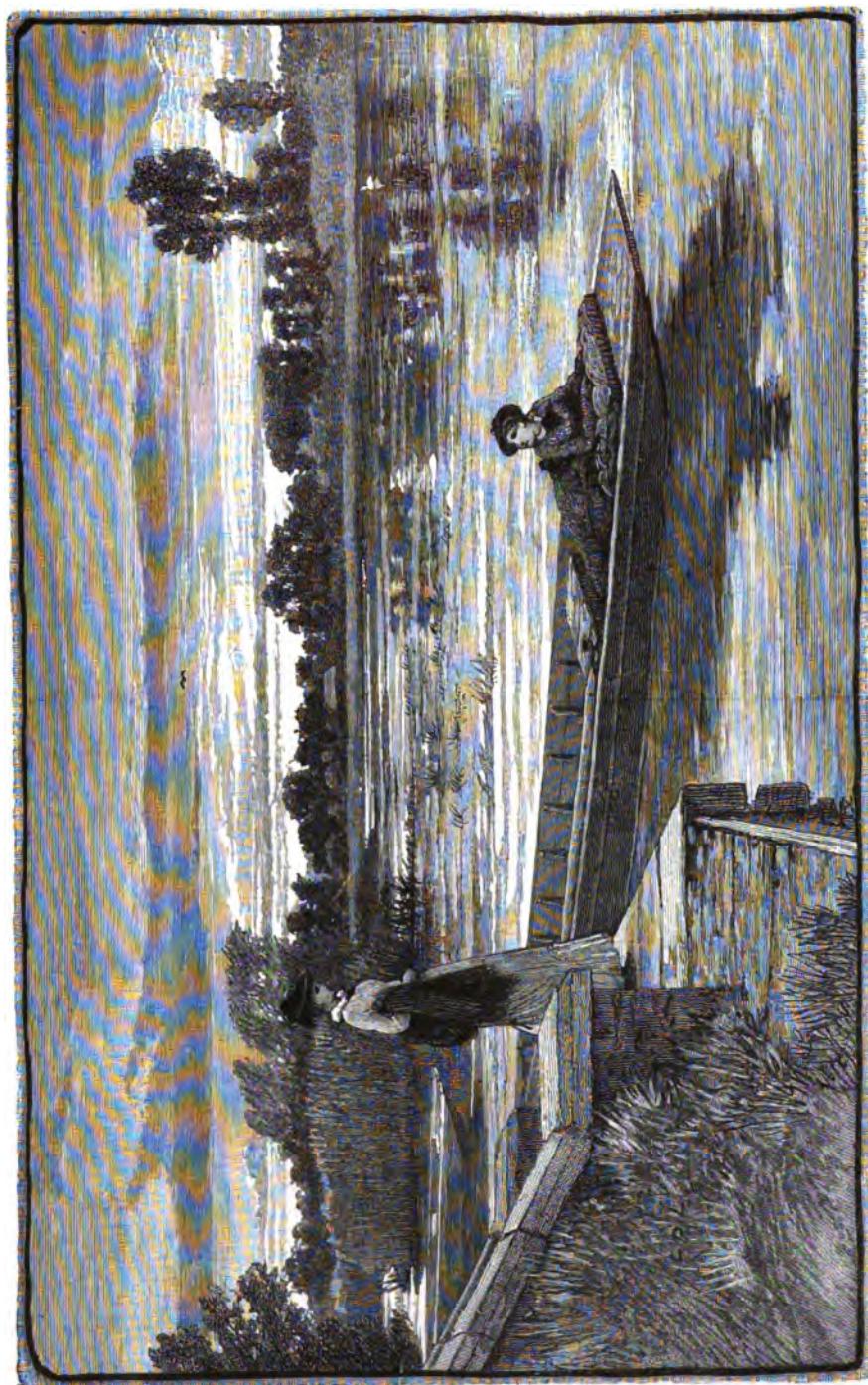
After a long day on the river in comparative solitude, there is much pleasure in the contrast afforded by the bustle of the streets and shops in a town, and the appetite for the beauties of nature receives a fresh sharpening. On Saturday night the

market place at Reading is a most amusing place in which to stroll about after dinner. Quack medicine vendors and Cheap Jacks are in great force, the country people flocking round them in picturesque crowds. There is a capital hotel in Friars Street, and your boat can be left at Caversham Bridge. In September or October I never found any difficulty in obtaining a night's lodging anywhere on the river, for the fashionable season is then over, the only visitors in those months being artists or anglers.

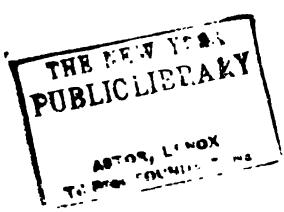
If time allows, the journey up the river is for many reasons preferable to the down one; in the down-stream journey the beauty and wildness of the scenery keep lessening as you near the metropolis, producing with me always rather a sad feeling. Each mile-post at the locks reminds me that I am returning to town, or am so much nearer to it, and that my journey is only of a temporary character—in fact a Saturday to Monday sort of affair; whereas, in making an up journey, hopes are kept up by the sense of exploration, of finding something new, accompanied by the delightful feeling of getting away farther from man, town work, and smoke. Another advantage is that, as the stream is against you, and the work of course harder, there is not so much temptation to "git along," as the Yankees say, time being afforded to bestow a little notice on the passing banks. A boat ought to be had cheaper for the up journey, as, in consequence of the number of down-river excursions, Salter's vans are in the season continually occupied in carrying back to Oxford the empty boats. These boat-vans pass my door at Remenham pretty nearly every day in July and August, with five or six boats to a load, and are the great delight of my children. To a punter the journey up is nearly as easy as the one down, if

the eddies are well known, and taken proper advantage of. The chief drawback to the up journey is in sailing ; the stream makes a great deal of difference, and it requires a really good stiff breeze to take you along at any pace. For those who enjoy nature most in its solitude, I confidently recommend the river in the month of October. It is true the banks do not then display such brilliant flowers as in July and August ; but the autumnal colouring and morning mists are most lovely. If only the weather is fine, nothing can then exceed the river beauty ; the heat is not so excessive, the toil not so fatiguing, and the charm of having the river all to oneself is very great. I have punted from Cookham to Maidenhead at that time of the year without meeting a single boat, on which occasion the beauty of the Cliveden woods no words could describe ; in the autumn, rushes, reeds, and bank plants do not all turn the same colour, so that in a subdued key the variety is quite as great as in July. The drawback to this season is the length of the evenings ; but with pleasant companions the time passes easily enough ; the smell of the wood fires, the general peace and tranquillity of the nights are extremely soothing and good for one. To me the whole poetry of the river is at that season very impressive, and I am astonished when I think how few people there are who enjoy it ; though at the same time I am very glad it is so, as if the month of October became fashionable on the river, much of the charm would be lost.

One of the commonest mistakes made by boating parties is the habit of taking one or two big dogs along with them ; small dogs are troublesome, but the large ones are a terrible nuisance, and prove the source of frequent misery to their owners. The curious thing is, that people are so unconscious of this, repeating



Landing Place at Monkey Island.



the error again and again. I hardly ever go on the water without witnessing the folly of the practice. I am myself very fond of dogs, and as a companion on a country walk, nothing can be better than a good dog. Sir Walter Scott always took a number of dogs with him when walking. He gave my father his reason for liking them on these excursions ; it was that they formed such good objects in the foreground of the scene, bounding along and appearing in unexpected places in front, thus affording a standard by which to judge of the size of the natural objects around them. All this is very true, and on a walk the master and his dog are mutually benefited by being together ; but not so in a boat. There even the best of trained dogs will fidget about and want to change its place, like a troublesome child, in doing which it seriously affects the trim of the boat. Dogs get excited at things they see passing, and bark and distract the attention. Over and over again they are told to lie down, which they could do far better at home. Sooner or later comes the inevitable swim, after which they can no longer be taken into the boat, though they will still give much trouble in their unceasing endeavours to get in again. They are told to go ashore, and when at last they do so, they bound along the bank, watching their opportunity. They jump in and swim for the boat the moment it nears the bank, having of course to return discomfited to the shore. At a lock it is ten to one that they manage to get aboard, when having, all wet and dirty, run along the whole length of the boat, wagging their tails in the people's faces, and upsetting everything they can, they are bundled out once again. As the tow-path frequently changes sides, the intelligent brutes constantly get pounded by walls or impedi-

ments, in which case they take to the water, most probably landing on some private grounds, or an island, when the boat will have to stop for them, until they have at last found the regular tow-path again. Delays of this sort are innumerable.

Sometimes dogs get after water rats, standing a chance of being lost or left behind whilst they flounder about amongst the rushes, frightening the wild birds, and smashing the flowers. If unaccustomed to the country, it is not unlikely to see the canine favourite set off at full gallop after a herd of cows or oxen, when it will soon be out of sight of its owner in the boat, who will have to land and administer chastisement. When the inn is arrived at for the night, the dog at once becomes an anxiety. If tied up in a strange place he is almost sure to howl ; he will therefore have to sleep in his master's bedroom. Dogs when wet and muddy smell unpleasant as they dry ; if there are other dogs at the inn the new comer will be likely to have trouble as he goes bustling about on his arrival. On leaving a place where you have stopped, dogs have a trick of getting left behind, a return becoming necessary. My friend Mr. S. P. Jackson, the water-colour artist, has three white Spitz dogs, well known at Henley. They accompany him usually on board his launch, but if he lands for a short time they jump ashore, and when he starts again one of the three is perfectly certain to be left behind. These are well-trained dogs, and when once on board give no trouble, but this is partly owing to their dislike to getting wet ; last year one did get a ducking at Henley Regatta, becoming very miserable, and a great wet trouble to his owner for some time.

Collies are all the rage just now, and I know few things more encumbering than a town-kept collie dog out for a holiday

on the river. A regular old river-side dog on the part of the river he knows well will give very little trouble. I had one of this sort at Marlow, which belonged to the house I took ; he was a fine black retriever named Sam, one of the best dogs for the water I ever remember seeing ; he knew his way about, and all the short cuts to and from the river. He was far too polite to offer to get into the boat without an invitation, and when I stopped anywhere he would amuse himself by diving after great stones, which he brought ashore. I never had the least anxiety about losing him, as he could find his way home whenever he liked, though he generally preferred to stop with the boat. I need not add that my children loved him dearly. Though Sam gave me no trouble, other dogs have. A punt is worse than a rowing boat in many respects as far as the dog nuisance is concerned, for as in punting the bank has to be hugged, the animal finds frequent opportunities of jumping aboard from the shore, especially as the punt is such an easy boat to jump into ; a muddy dog will dirt and scratch the deck of your till in a most aggravating manner, and as he can run up and down the boat easily he is most likely to do so, in which amusement he may trip you up and throw you overboard by getting between your legs.

I believe a cat might be trained to travel in a punt, and prove a nice quiet pet. I once saw a very pretty little kitten so travelling with a gentleman and lady. Dick Andrews, the fisherman, had a small tabby tom which could swim very well, and occasionally went with him in the boat. Cats are always seen at locks, where they invariably come down in a friendly way to look at a punt when passing, a distinction they do not pay to rowing boats. No doubt hopes of fish are the attraction ;

though I have seldom anything for them, lock cats always board my punt like custom-house officers, usually running to smell at the well.

There is one sort of boating party which should always be accompanied by dogs—I mean the campers. To them the dog is very useful, both as a companion and as a night guard. Last year a camping party was attacked by some tramps, who took everything they could lay their hands on. A revolver and one or two good dogs should I think be always taken as precautions on these camping expeditions.

As a bachelor I was a most devoted dog-master, and can well understand the infatuation people have for these creatures; but when married life, with the cares and troubles of babies, commenced, the dog at once lost his high place in my affections. It is the babies that do it, for married people who have no children always take fondly to their dogs. To slightly alter poor Sir Roger Tichborne's famous saying, "Some people have plenty dogs, but no babies; others have plenty babies, but no dogs." For babies proper I have no great predilection, it being impossible to say much in favour of a creature which cannot distinguish between the pains of hunger and those of indigestion, or sees no difference between the flavours of castor oil and dill water; but I plead guilty to a weakness for my children when over their first year, and I confess to hampering myself frequently with them in my punt, the future prospect of being towed or punted by them in my old age, affording me inward consolation.

Another mistake which is common enough, and to some extent very excusable, is the picking of water-lilies. These flowers look so very satisfactory and inviting in the water, that

it is no wonder young ladies and children, the moment they see them, are seized with the desire of picking them ; but they are miserable flowers to carry home, becoming rapidly withered and dowdy. They are very much out of place in a vase, their main beauty, which is connected with their floating character, being lost. Even in a flat dish, with a surrounding of forget-me-nots, though pretty for a few hours, they very soon lose their freshness, and begin to smell horribly. Town people are constantly seen returning home by train from a day on the river, carrying a large bundle of water-lilies, with long trailing stalks and drooping heads, a misery to themselves and to their fellow-passengers.

Country cousins have a favourite custom of making up a large bouquet of flowers and presenting it to their friends when they leave for town ; " just a few flowers which they think you would like," as if your hands were five or six instead of two, while even those two are most likely fully occupied with bags, umbrellas, newspapers, and the usual impedimenta of railway travelling. Long before town is reached, the poor flowers are quite done for. For my part, when I receive a nosegay of this description, I pick out one pretty bud for remembrance sake, stick it in my button-hole, and present the rest to the first little girl I meet on my journey. But a water-lily bundle is no use for button-hole or anything else, and had far better be thrown out of the carriage window. There are some river flowers which bear taking home, and which will revive and flourish in captivity. Forget-me-nots, though drooping when first brought home, will soon cheer up, and last for several days ; the beautiful flowering rush will last for a fortnight, and is well worth taking home. Arrow-heads, water plantain,

meadow-sweet, and many others are likewise pretty hardy of carriage. The cat's-tail reed-mace, and teasles, are to be recommended as very ornamental. In the autumn, the seed-pods of the iris are good things; when the red seed-berries are ripe, these pods open and curl over backwards in a very picturesque manner, and as they are dry, they will last a whole winter.* I have seen these pods in the greengrocers' shops about Christmas time. My friend Mr. F. Smallfield has a wonderful taste for arranging flowers, and at his house in the winter may be seen the most exquisite combinations of different dried weeds, berries, and seed-pods, the great advantage of which being that they last long without any trouble of water.

If you are quite determined to take home water-lilies, or other succulent river flowers, the only way to do it is to have a jug or can with you, in which to pop them directly they are picked. If you live near the river, this can very well be done, but for my own part I am strongly for letting the flowers grow, especially water-lilies, as they never can look more lovely than on the water. It is very aggravating now that owing to the increase in the number of pleasure parties, hardly a single spread of water-lilies can be found on the Thames, that does not exhibit traces of destruction and devastation. Perhaps the cruellest violation of the poetry of the river that I ever witnessed, was a steam-launch puffing along with a jug of poor water-lilies placed in close proximity to the sweltering boiler. Surely the launch does quite enough to spoil the beauty of the river, without robbing the peaceful backwaters of their gems.

The late fatal accident at Shepperton, which took place about half-past nine o'clock in the evening, reminds me of the

* The iris pods are represented in the initial to Chapter VII.

extreme folly of those who stay out on the water after dark. In the case at Shepperton, as my readers no doubt recollect, a steam-launch was hurrying home up the river, and a rowing boat doing the same thing down ; the evidence, if it proved nothing else, at least showed by its conflicting character that neither boat was quite sure which side of the river it was on ; and indeed at night the reflections from the banks are perfectly baffling to anyone. No steam-launch should be allowed under any pretext whatever to travel on the upper reaches of the river after dark, and it would be a most wise thing for the Thames Conservancy to pass a law that all the locks should be closed at dusk. It might inconvenience a few, who at the risk of their own and other people's lives so time their journey that the finish of it takes place in the dark ; but it would, I am quite sure, save at least half-a-dozen lives every year, that are sacrificed to the stupid practice of venturing on the water too late at night. I have known of a great number of river accidents, quite the majority of which have happened in consequence of the darkness. The accident at Maidenhead that I described in a former chapter, where the Eton eight in hurrying home ran into the boat-load of town people under the railway arch, took place about half-past nine. It seems unwarrantable that at such an hour a racing boat should have had still six miles to row to reach home. Another most distressing accident took place many years ago at Goring, in which one of the sons of J. Constable, R.A., lost his life, entirely owing to the darkness. The two brothers, Mr. A. and L. Constable, were staying at the lock-house, either Goring or Cleve, I do not know which ; they had been up in their boat to Wallingford, and were returning home late in the evening, when owing to the darkness they

mistook their way, and the boat striking on some unseen stump, filled and sank beneath them. They were both very good swimmers, and at first swam hand in hand, but as they thought they could get on better alone, they separated, and the eldest, Alfred, was drowned ; the younger one, a very strong swimmer indeed, had almost given himself up, when his foot touched the ground. In the morning, it was found that the boat had sunk very near a small rush island, on which, if they could have seen it, both might easily have saved themselves.

When I was at Pangbourne, a young man lost his life in the lock. He was passing down in the late evening ; his boat, without his seeing it in time, got hitched up by the side of the lock, and he was thrown into the water ; he was a good swimmer, but before he could do anything to save himself, he was drawn down and sucked through the sluice hole, probably getting stunned or injured so much, that he could not exert himself afterwards, thus paying the penalty of his folly in being on the river in the dark.

A good deal of caution is necessary in passing a lock, even in daylight, and accidents frequently occur. In my opinion it is most foolish to add to the risk by passing through in the dark. A year or two ago I was shocked to see numbers of light, outrigged boats, many of them with ladies on board, coming down through Bell Weir Lock as late as ten o'clock at night, and some even later. I was stopping for the night at the "Anglers' Rest," and sat talking to the lock-keeper in the evening. He had continually to open his lock gates to allow these boats to pass, most of which were filled with pleasure parties returning to Staines. The man told me it was the usual thing. He complained of the way it curtailed his night's rest, and fully endorsed my opinion about the danger. I have seen the same thing at

Marlow Lock, and no doubt nearer London the evil must be far commoner. It is bad enough when the boat's crew consists of young men ; but that ladies and children should be on the water at that time is very wrong. I know how very bold and adventurous the girl of the period has become, and how hard it is for a young man to play the prudent part. I can see therefore nothing for it but to order the locks to be closed at dark. Of course, if the moon is very bright and tempting, I do not see any harm in a short excursion on a part of the river which is thoroughly well known ; but to travel a distance that renders the passing a lock necessary at night is the height of folly. Apart from the dangers of locks, snags, and collisions, there is, too, the unpleasant chance of fouling some floating carrion with the oars. I am sorry to say that floating dead dogs are by no means uncommon objects by the river shores.

Common people seem far more callous with regard to their existence than well-to-do ones. Parties of bean-feasters out on the river for their holiday behave in a way which renders it perfectly marvellous that they ever get safe on shore again. Accidents do occur sometimes ; but they never serve the useful end of inducing more caution amongst this sort of people. They positively court danger, hiring rotten old boats, which they generally crowd to excess ; they change places with one another in the most awkward manner, and the chances are not one in the party can swim. Country bumpkins are nearly as bad ; their ideas of what a boat can hold are equally obscure ; but they are seldom quite as drunken and noisy as the bean-feasters. I remember when I was at Streatley one evening following a party of hand-bell ringers, who had hired a crazy old boat, which two of them rowed ; the rest, about six, sat in

the stern, which was barely two inches from the water's edge. In spite of this they pulled about, catching crabs and larking with one another, those in the stern ringing their bells. My wife was with me, and I kept within reach of them, expecting every minute to have to pick them up. They got on all right, however, and I daresay only thought that we kept near them in order to hear their music. The captain of an emigrant ship being asked by my father if he was not afraid of fire with so many passengers, replied, "No, sir. If one fool of a fellow sits up late and smokes his pipe, there is sure to be another nervous fool who sits up to watch him." Such, I suppose, was the case with me. This sort of gentry are not always grateful for help, for I saw at Marsh Lock a drunken man upset and pulled out of the water by a gentleman, who, instead of thanks, received nothing but abuse, and had to administer a good sound chastisement to the brute. I was a little distance off, and as I saw the gentleman first pull the man out of the water, and then proceed to pummel him, I could not imagine what could be the reason of the proceeding, which had quite a comic effect.

The much vexed question as to the use and abuse of steam launches on the river would, from its importance, require a whole chapter to itself; but as I am perfectly hostile to the launches, and it may be, slightly prejudiced in the matter, there would not be much use in my attempting to discuss the subject in an argumentative manner. I would, therefore, rather class the launches amongst those things which, in my opinion, are simply mistakes. I do not believe it is possible to really appreciate the river from on board a launch. The motion of the boat causes the perspective, both in front and behind, to alter so rapidly in a converging and diverging manner, as to

have on the eye quite a painful effect, which after a short time becomes very wearisome. In the bows the wind and spray render a steady gaze a-head very uncomfortable, and a smoke out of the question. In this part of the vessel the passengers generally sit, as depicted in Walker's inimitable drawing in "Punch," with their backs to the view. In the stern the view is spoilt by the launch's smoke and swell, the banks are washed by a travelling wave, and the pretty floating weeds are all in wild commotion. Here too, all is gritty and black from the smoke stack, and the odious smell of the rancid engine oil is anything but the attar of roses.

Inside the cabin the air is close and confined to a degree. No part of the boat is free from the everlasting jig-jigging vibration from the screw, which will produce an almost certain head-ache to a novice in steamboat travelling.

What I really believe the misguided owners enjoy, and the only thing, is themselves: it is the feeling of pride that delights—the pride of being seen as the captain of a private yacht adorned with brass nobs and polished fittings, brass-banded water-casks, gilding, monograms, flags, &c.; to go puffing along with a stoker and boy under your command; the pleasure of whistling to announce yourself to the lock-keepers, or to warn boats in front; to have an excuse for wearing the manly flannels of the rowing man, without exercising a single muscle in them: these are the main temptations that usually induce people to set up a launch.

After each season's use of the boat an increase in the size of its owner is likely to take place, but not exactly in the arms, shoulders or legs. An appetite will no doubt come from merely being in the open air, but the healthy perspiration is wanting,

and the ease with which drinks of all kinds can be consumed on board, especially as there is little else to do, has a direct tendency to corpulence and enlarged liver.

I am fond of studying the looks of people on board these boats, and from repeated observations I am quite sure they seldom feel happy on their voyages. They are generally rather pompous, and laugh and talk to one another, but the wholesome happiness which proceeds from labour is entirely absent. There is no pleasure in arriving anywhere in a launch like that of landing from a small boat which you have navigated yourself.

If the object of travelling in a launch is simply the speed with which the journey can be accomplished, I should much prefer the railway ; on that the jig-jig vibration is far less, and you can at any rate read or smoke in peace and comfort, besides getting over the distance far more rapidly. If it were possible for rich people to have private railway trains, with engines polished, highly decorated with their monograms, one or two flags flying, private guards, and engine-drivers in livery, I have no doubt launches would soon cease on the river, as the superior attractions of enjoying oneself on the metals would rapidly become all the fashion. As for scenery, railway cuttings and embankments are quite as pretty and interesting as anything the steam-launcher ever sees on the river ; and only think how he would enjoy the delights of a tunnel, or the excitement of a real private railway accident to which only his own particular friends had received exclusive invitations.

I have so seldom travelled in these boats, and when I have it has been under such exceptionally favourable conditions, that I daresay I am unaware of a great many other drawbacks and

unpleasantnesses incurred by their proprietors. The cost of the craft when new; the trouble of looking after it; the constant something wanting to be done to the engine; the bore of employing men and stokers; the supplies of coal that have repeatedly to be obtained; the engine-fitter's bills for repairs, and a variety of other petty annoyances, such as breaking down on a journey, or running aground, must form some slight set-off to the transient joy of dashing along for twenty miles once or twice during the summer, in all the glory of steamboat proprietorship. I confess to having witnessed, once or twice, with great pleasure the discomfiture of a disabled launch, the lump of a boat being towed down stream to the nearest large town, on account of a broken shaft, or something wrong with its injector, or else stuck helplessly aground on a sand-bank. Besides which the numbers of faded, dingy-looking, second-hand launches lying here and there, at different places, for sale or hire, gradually getting more and more rusty and dilapidated, tell tales of the rapidity with which their former owners grew tired of them. At Hampton, Surbiton, and Richmond there are a very large number of these abandoned favourites, safely moored, and I am glad to say, eating their boilers off.

My readers will have observed that I have not in these remarks alluded to the well-known objections that have been so often made against the launches on the score of the damage they do. I have passed over the serious injury they cannot help causing to the banks, no matter how slowly they proceed; the heavy curses of the injured fishermen, artists, and boat-letters; the fright of ladies and nervous people; the frequent accidents, many of a fatal character; the fouling of the water, the smoke, the disturbance, the whistling and general ugliness.

Anyone whose chief pleasure is the gratification of his vanity and pride, is quite incapable of considering for an instant the injury such gratification may inflict on others ; though I believe if he could be brought to understand how very hollow his imagined pleasures were, and how little envy the empty parade excited in the breasts of others, it might be possible to imbue him with a distaste for further mischief on the river. Of course I do not flatter myself that anything I have written could produce such a happy result, but if it may possibly cause some misguided but unselfish people to hesitate before committing themselves to the miseries of a steam-launch, I shall feel I have not written in vain.

There are one or two instances in which absolution should be accorded to the steamers ; many owners of these boats certainly command our respect by their careful management, and courteous behaviour on the river. I have received frequent hospitality on board of some at the Regatta, where a launch is by no means out of place, and once or twice when behind time I have had the benefit of a friendly tow, and it is very hard at the risk of affronting old and kind friends to have to obey my conscience and write as I have. The little launch "Ethel," belonging to Mr. S. P. Jackson, the water-colour artist, deserves a very special mention in its favour. This gentleman in his launch has never passed even an empty boat moored by the water's edge without slackening his speed ; he is ever ready to use his boat for any kindly purpose,—to fetch a doctor, to enable a friend to catch a train, to coach a racing crew, or tow a belated boat ; he seldom returns home of an evening without boats, towing behind him often one or two heavy fishing punts ; and it was owing to his energy in pursuing

another launch, which had swamped a rowing boat, that its owner was brought to justice.* Mr. Jackson is no amateur in his boat. He himself is a skilful mechanician, and is able to take his engine to pieces or repair it himself; his boat itself is his delight; with him the mere pride of showing off on the river is utterly despised and carefully avoided. And, moreover, it must be remembered that his boat has a definite use for sketching, for which purpose he also lends her frequently to his brother artists. I cannot help thinking most people will agree with me in according him absolution from the maledictions to which the general race of launches is liable. Very many of the extenuating circumstances that I have mentioned in favour of Mr. Jackson's launch apply equally well to the launch belonging to Mr. Thornycroft, the sculptor; the "Water Lily" under his careful management has, I am sure, never annoyed or disturbed anyone. When I travelled in her many years ago from Taplow to Cookham, the speed was so gentle that I could see the fish swimming in the water. This boat is the pet of its owner, who works in her himself very hard; she has been also used repeatedly for sketching purposes.

And lastly, I do not grudge the weekly journeys of the "Isis" or "Thames" from London to Oxford. These are genuine speculations, and not the wanton display of opulence. The passengers on board are chiefly composed of a class of people who would not otherwise see the river in any way; quiet, middle-aged townsfolk, many of them, perhaps, taking the trip on their only holiday, mixed with a few old ladies and

* The owner not being on board his launch at the time of the collision was only fined five pounds, but the engine driver and steersman were sent to jail for a fortnight. It was not the first occasion on which this launch had done mischief.

invalids, who may be deterred by nervousness from other river excursions, form the bulk of the passengers. I came down from Oxford to Henley in this boat on purpose to see what she was like, and I must say the passengers, who were such as I have described, enjoyed the journey very much in a quiet sort of way.

In travelling to Henley by rail I generally prefer going in the second-class compartments, partly from motives of economy, but chiefly on account of the greater variety and interest to be found amongst the passengers. First-class passengers appear to me generally too much impressed with the sense of their greatness ; little or no conversation have they for strangers, and of late years on the Henley journey in the first-class compartments the travellers consist chiefly of young well-to-do Philistines, "oiled and curled Assyrian bulls," with faultless dress, and supercilious manners, who smoke cigars, read all manner of sporting papers, and whose talk to one another generally relates to horses. Not much can be got by studying them in the train, nor when met with afterwards on and about the river, either in steam-launches, or at pigeon, cricket, or lawn-tennis matches. On the other hand, in the second-class a great variety of travellers is sure to be met with. It is true one does find there occasionally honest John Thomas and the ladies' maids (indeed quite lately I had the honour of travelling with three magnificent young men in the uniform of His Grace the Duke of Wellington), but they are clean and civil, and their artless talk by no means unamusing. The company of an occasional " 'Arry" is the worst that can happen to you in this class, but by far the greater number of second-class travellers will be found to be simple straightforward people, not above conversation with

strangers, and I have many times derived much amusement and instruction in a second-class compartment. I remember once learning more about the different sorts of wheat than I ever before knew, from an intelligent corn factor, whose pockets were filled with little sample bags, in which were English, American, Australian, and Russian wheat, and the properties of each were most fully described to me. A linendraper of Maidenhead, with whom I travelled, told me a number of interesting stories. He commenced conversation by remarking on the beauty of the river, and informed me that a great many artists visited Taplow; amongst others he mentioned my own name, saying he had been told that Leslie had painted a picture up by the Cliveden Woods for which he had received one thousand pounds. I did not tell him who I was, but corrected him as to the picture to which he referred, which was really painted by Mr. Calderon, being his well-known work entitled "Sighing his Soul into his Lady's Face," the background of which was taken from Cliveden. My friend went on talking, and gave me several very amusing stories of various juries he had served on, finishing with the relation of an incident that happened to him when he was a young man behind the counter at Swan & Edgar's. It was as follows:—A lady came to the shop and asked to be shown some very fine white satin; none appeared to be quite good enough, and, of course, my friend put the usual question to her as to the purpose for which the satin was required. "Ah!" said she, "you would never guess; the satin is to make napkins with for a dinner table. My husband has lately made in Parliament a splendid speech, and at a dinner in which he will entertain the distinguished men of his party, I intend having passages from

his speech engraved in gold on white satin to be placed as doilies round the table." The lady was Lady Beaconsfield. I might have travelled for a very long time in a first-class carriage without meeting so amusing a companion as my Maidenhead friend.

I believe that even in third-class carriages much amusement and instruction can be obtained from the passengers ; but on the Henley line I never go third class, as apart from the inferior accommodation, in the summer months the carriages are often filled with parties of rough London bean-feasters, and pot-hunting bank fishermen, whose conversation mainly consists of vulgar chaff, and whose beer jugs, ground-bait bags, and macintoshes smell abominably.

A late lamentable accident at Teddington Weir, reminds me of a dangerous method of loading a light boat, that has been lately much practised ; neither the coroner, jury, nor the unfortunate occupiers of the boat on the occasion, seem to have known what it was that rendered the boat so unmanageable. From the evidence of Mr. F. J. Block, who was steering, it appears that Mr. Block was in the stern, Miss Humphreys and her brother rowing double sculls, and Mr. Corney Grain (no light weight) in the bows, lying down ; this appears to be so from the following evidence :—" Directly they started again, after changing the deceased's sculls, the stream caught the nose of the boat, and turned it half round. When the deceased saw the danger, he tried to pull ; not being ready, he fell over backwards on to the bow of the boat and on to Mr. Grain's legs." What I wish my readers to notice, is the fact that Mr. Grain was seated in the bows ; now in such a stream as was running, it would be quite impossible to have straightened the boat to her

course with the bows forced down into the water by the weight there, even if Mr. Humphreys had not missed his stroke. A simple experiment will show the difficulty; stand on one foot, place your weight on the heel, you will find that you can then turn your toe easily to the right or left; whereas, if you place the weight on the toe, it becomes fixed at once.

If two people row in a boat by themselves against the stream, with no weight in the stern, the boat keeps sheering to the right or left, and is with the greatest difficulty kept straight; the same difficulty which proceeds from the grip of the water that the sharp narrow bows have when pressed down deeply, attends a boat in which the main weight is not well aft, constant use of the rudder being necessary, but if there is not much way on, as was the case in this accident, the rudder has no effect whatever. Light boats are built now very long and narrow, and as the stern holds only one or two at most, another seat has been made on the floor of the bows, with a back board; a weight here is far nearer the end of the floating part of a boat than the seat in the stern, and tends to put the boat to a very dangerous disadvantage in the matter of steering. I am confident if Mr. Corney Grain had been beside Mr. Block in the stern, no accident would have occurred.

In bidding farewell to my readers, though I cannot lay claim in these rambling sketches to any great moral intentions, I would still like to impress on them how much benefit and instruction can be obtained by a faithful study of the gentle river. Its ever-flowing waters are full of analogies to human life; the bending rushes, yielding willows, and lowly weeds afford us lessons in humility, forbearance, and unostentation; whilst patience, vigilance, and endurance are taught in the most salu-



tary manner to those who take their turn at the oar, punt-pole, or tow-line ; the various petty hardships of the river-side—toil, hunger, and thirst, sun, wind, rain, or the humble accommodation at the little inns, when cheerfully encountered, supply a wholesome check to the pride, the cares, and troubles of life. Instruction and amusement can be obtained by friendly intercourse with the inhabitants of the village where the night's stay is made, or by conversation with the fishermen or lock-keepers. And in the evening twilight, when the day's labours are over, when the mill wheel has ceased to turn, and the last few stragglers of the long stream of rooks have reached their nests, as we stand gazing from the bridge on the dark tranquil waters beneath, listening to the sound of the never-ending flow at the distant weir, there arises in our hearts and minds a holy feeling of participation in that peace which passeth all human understanding.



THE END.



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